ELECTRONIC SOUND

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ISSUE 96

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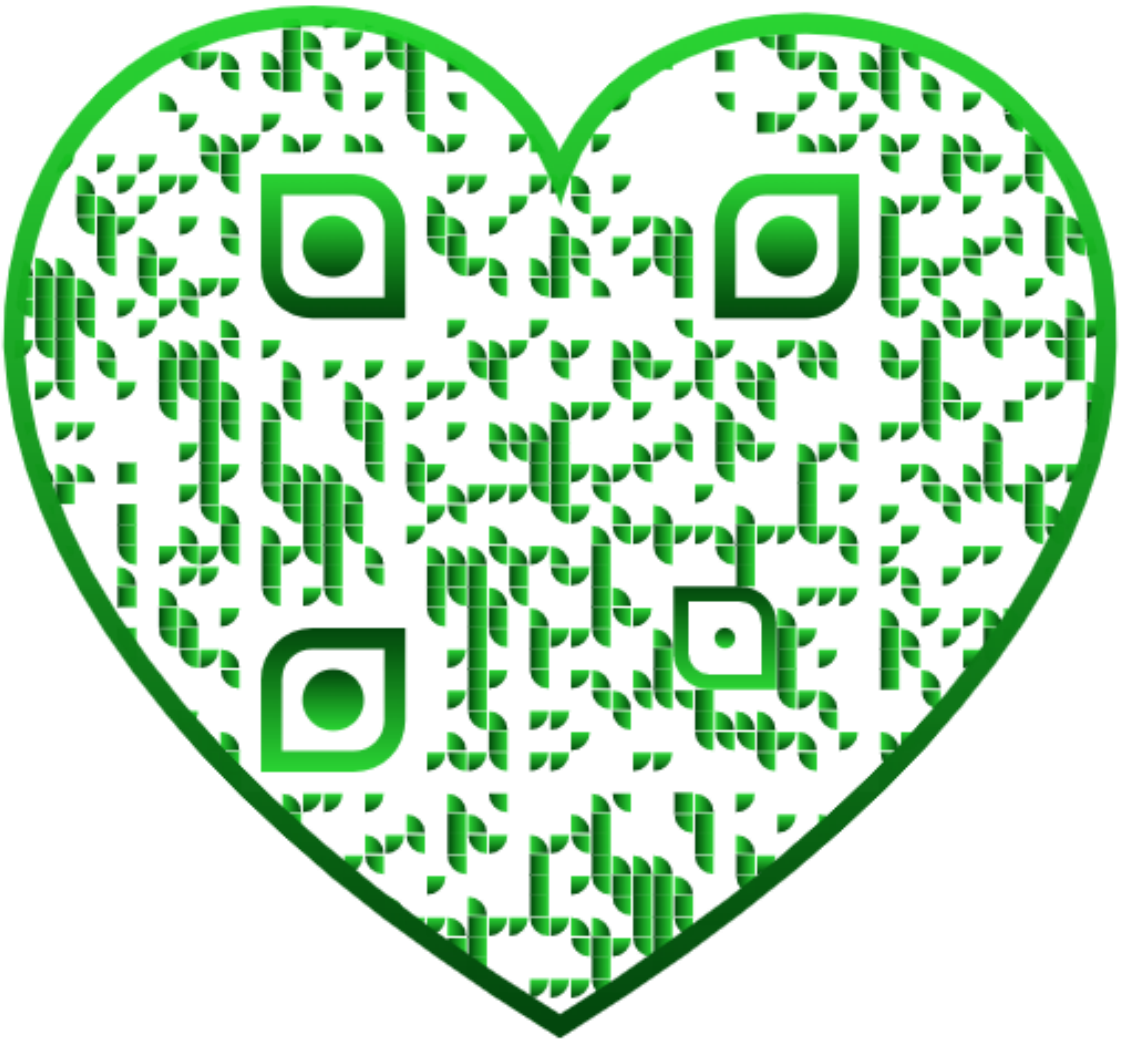
JEAN-MICHEL JARRE

OXYGENIUS

ALBUMS OF THE YEAR / PLAID / RON GEESIN / THE ORAM AWARDS / ACID KLAUS / TVAM / BELBURY POLY

HAUT VOLTAGE



Erased
Tapes

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Rival Consoles

The Art Ensemble of Chicago

Moor Mother

Bell Orchestre

Colin Stetson

Hatis Noit

Masayoshi Fujita

Anne Müller

Lubomyr Melnyk

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Crayon

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We're tickled pink to have Jean-Michel Jarre on the cover of Electronic Sound. Come to think of it, we're tickled any colour you care to mention.

Like most music magazines, we probably use the word "legend" a bit more than we should. It's completely justified with Jarre, though. He learned his trade from some of the best – Pierre Schaeffer, Pierre Henry, Karlheinz Stockhausen and Iannis Xenakis – and maintained close personal connections with these giants of early electronic sound over the decades that followed. His 'Oxygène' album put synth music into the upper reaches of the world's pop charts in 1976, trumping everything that even his most famous German cousins had managed up to that point. His grand-scale live extravaganzas, perhaps most famously in Paris in 1979 and Moscow in 1997, hit heights so high they ended up in the record books.

But however illustrious his history, Jarre has always been a man of the future, his focus fixed on the idea of moving forwards. Witness his spectacular live show at a virtual Notre-Dame on New Year's Eve in 2020. And if you didn't witness it, get yourself over to YouTube. With his new album, 'Oxymore', Jarre has once again set out to create something fresh, something different, even if he's taken a trip back to his roots for his initial impetus. The result is a musique concrète record crafted with 21st century technology, offering the listener a thrilling and immersive sound experience. As Jeremy Allen says in his interview with Jarre, "It's quite unlike anything else you'll have heard before".

Talking of Jean-Michel Jarre's roots, we're also tickled pink to be reissuing his debut single, featuring 'La Cage' and 'Erosmachine', to accompany this month's magazine. It's incredible to think that he recorded these two fascinating tracks at the end of the 1960s. And in the dark. By which we mean, quite literally, without any light. Check out page 7 for the full story on that. No wonder the sleeve notes on the reverse of the record call him "Le magicien troglodyte… régnant dans sa sombre cavern" ("The troglodyte magician… reigning in his dark cave").

We've lots of other great features for you this month too, including Plaid, The Oram Awards, Ron Geesin, Acid Klaus, TVAM, Belbury Poly and Pictish Trail. And since this is our last issue of 2022, it's also time for us to announce our Albums Of The Year. Turn to page 50 to see if any of your favourites are in there. By the way, you'll notice that we have a joint Number One this year, a decision which has caused huge controversy among the magazine staff, with threats of resignation, revolution, retribution and all sorts. Sacré bleu!

Have a great Christmas everybody. We'll see you back here in 2023.

Electronically yours,
Push and Mark

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MIRA FESTIVAL

Fira Montjuïc, Barcelona

11-12 NOVEMBER 2022

WORDS: CLAIRE FRANCIS
PICTURE: ALBA RUPEREZ

As we reach the tail end of 2022, it feels as though some sense of normality has finally returned to gigs and festivals. It's been a real joy to once again stand shoulder to shoulder with a bunch of strangers in a packed-out tent, sweaty club or muddy field, basking in the collective glow that only live music can induce.

To be totally honest, I've racked up a stupid amount of passport stamps attending various European festivals over the last 12 months. From multi-venue inner city showcases to back-to-nature gatherings in remote locations, they've all had something unique to offer – though Barcelona's MIRA Festival may well top the list.

Held this year at a new location in the spacious Fira Montjuïc, a grand exhibition centre built in the 1920s, MIRA 2022 is a two-day indoor event that runs from early evening into the wee hours, featuring live performances, DJ sets, contemporary art, and an array of digital installations.

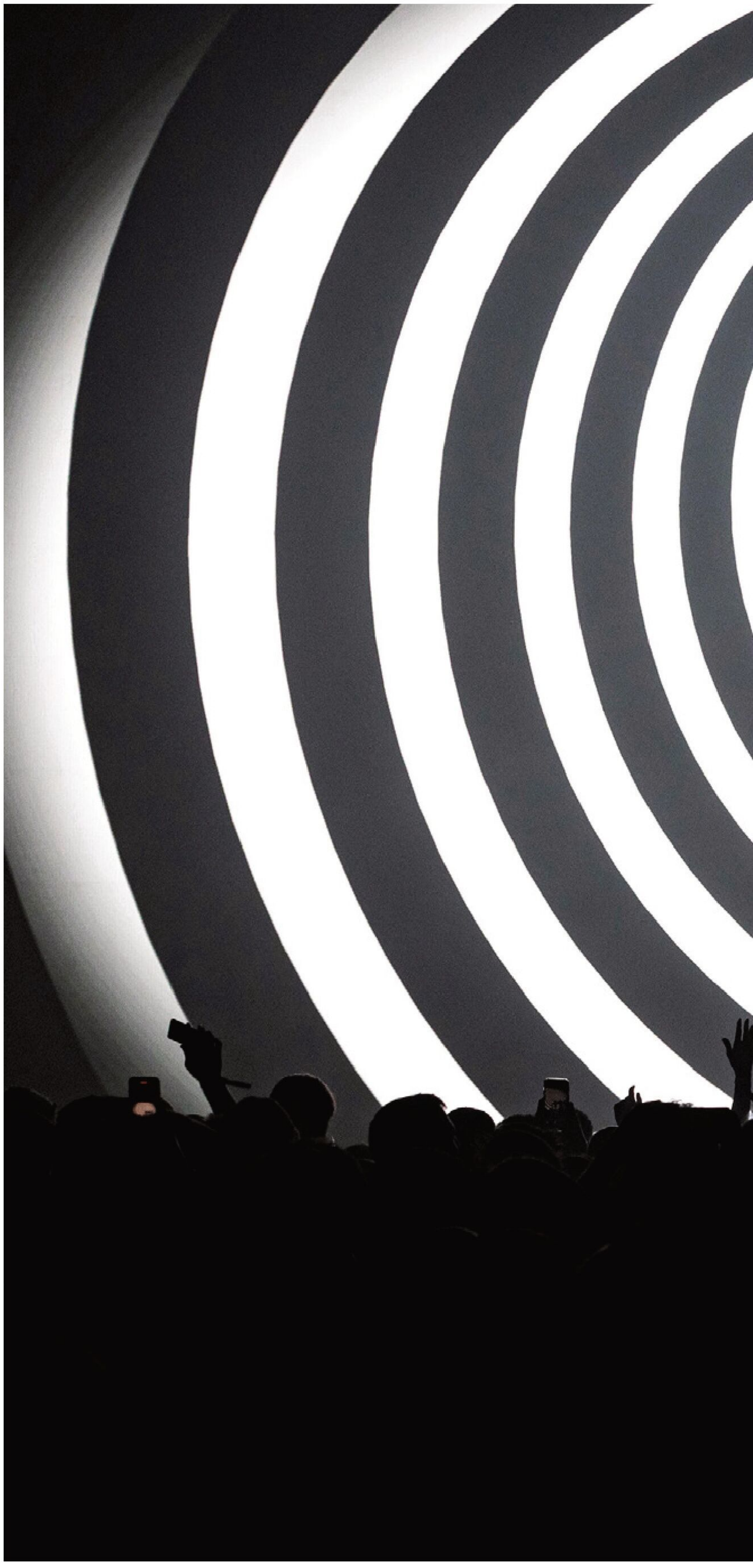
There's a lot to lose yourself in, but the highlight of the weekend is undoubtedly Michael Rother's Neu! 50th anniversary show on Friday night. Rother himself gives a transportive performance, driven by the ghost of the Dinger beat, here brilliantly reanimated by drummer Hans Lampe. The sound on the Ground Stage could be louder, yet it makes little difference to the swathes of fans bouncing in ecstasy as the propulsive rhythm of 'Hallogallo' kicks in.

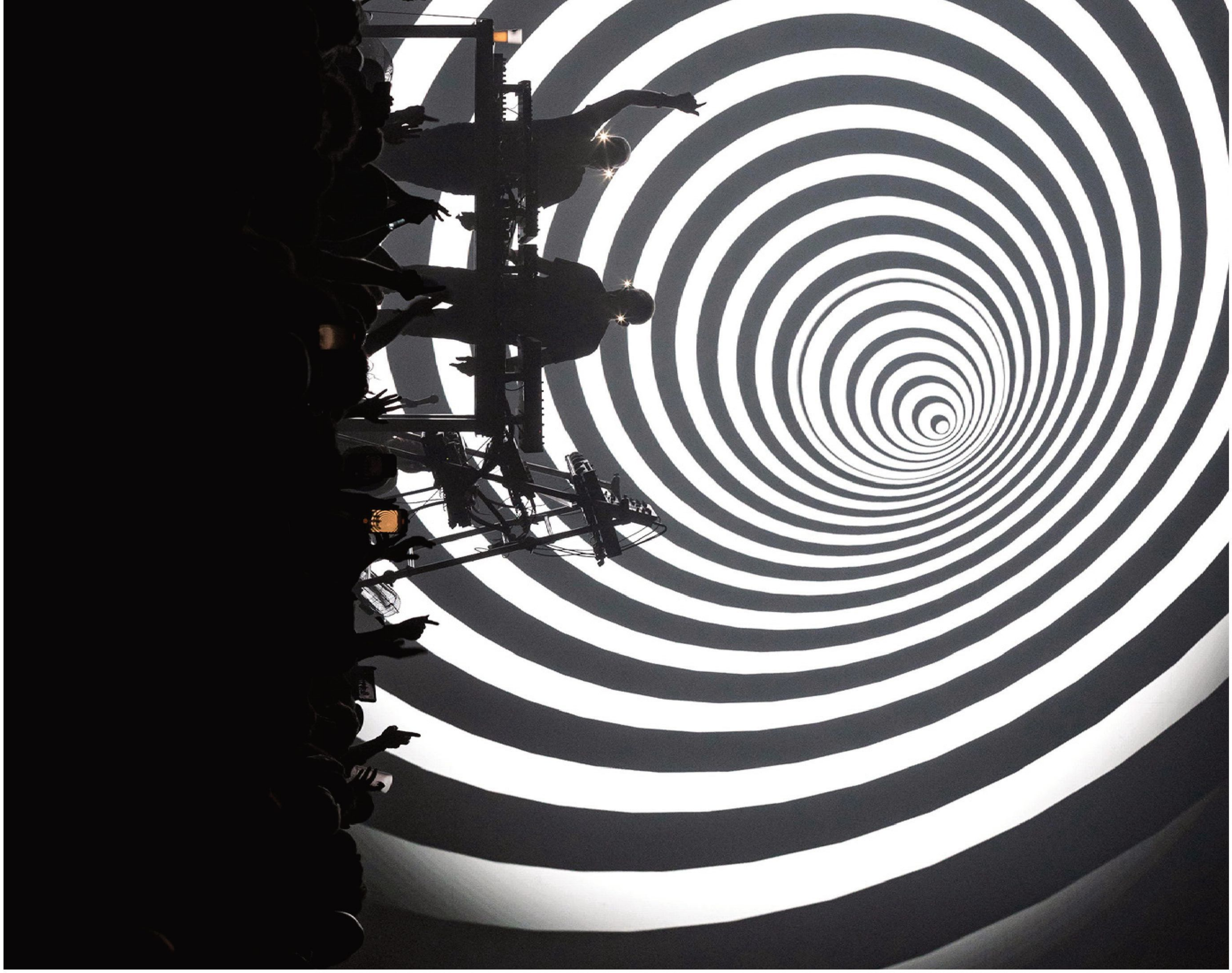
From the motorik magic of the early 70s, we leap into early 90s dance mania as Orbital take to the Cloud Stage. Playing tracks old and new, their live set is accompanied by spiralling visuals and images of crowds demonstrating in London, as one protestor's "TORIES OUT" sign synchronises perfectly with the jovially subversive 'PHUK'.

Like a stone skimming water, the programme skips across the decades of electronic music history, and on Saturday evening we settle into the hypnotic pull of Voices From The Lake's 2010s-era ambient techno. The Italian duo of Donato Dozzy and Neel craft a sublime, subtly paced hour-long recreation of their self-titled 2012 album, which peaks after a slow build through the melodic strains of 'ST (VFTL Rework)'.

Their set is an ideal primer for Clark, who inches us further back into the early 2000s with his new 'Body Riddle'-inspired live show, complete with corporeal visuals of amorphous body parts, as human fingers twist into alien landscapes. Loraine James then places us squarely back in the present day, with her enchanting live A/V performance created alongside artist Alessandra Leone, where prismatic cityscapes shimmer against James' skittering beats and heavenly electronics.

All this and we've barely scratched the surface of MIRA's stacked agenda, which also features Caterina Barbieri, Alva Noto, Blawan, Kali Malone, and a swathe of excellent after-hours DJ sets. It's the definition of being spoilt for choice, and as festivals go, that's certainly no bad thing.





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C. Visit electronicsound.co.uk/jarre to buy this release on its own for £8.99, but be quick because stocks are strictly limited

Jean-Michel Jarre
‘La Cage’ / ‘Erosmachine’
Silver vinyl seven-inch

This month’s exclusive seven-inch is a limited edition silver vinyl reissue of Jean-Michel Jarre’s ultra-rare debut single, complete with a reconstruction of the original picture sleeve

‘La Cage’ and ‘Erosmachine’, the two tracks featured on Jean-Michel Jarre’s 1971 debut single, were both recorded a couple of years before the seven-inch was released. At the time, he was studying at the Groupe de Recherches Musicales (GRM), the electroacoustic music laboratory in Paris headed by musique concrète pioneer Pierre Schaeffer. Jarre put together the main components of ‘La Cage’ at the GRM in the dead of night, with a friend acting as a lookout.

“As students, we were not allowed to go alone into the big professional studios,” he remembers. “They were kept locked and only the established composers could use them, but we managed to make a copy of the key so we were able to get inside the studios at night. I did most of ‘La Cage’ in the dark, including the sequences, because we didn’t dare turn a light on.”

The GRM’s close association with the Office de Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française (ORTF, previously known as RTF), which was responsible for French national radio and television, gave its tutors and students access to a wide array of broadcasting equipment, most notably the station’s oscillators. Jarre used at least 12 oscillators for the intensely rhythmic ‘La Cage’, together with a musical saw, a guitar which he played with a bow, and lots of percussive instruments, including rototoms.

“Working with oscillators and filter banks that had been hijacked from the radio station was a totally underground approach,” laughs Jarre. “The radio had been using oscillators for testing and maintenance before this, not for making any kind of music. Using them to make sequences in this way was really interesting and the result is something that sounds very electronic.”

Jarre took a quite different path for ‘Erosmachine’, a much more playful electroacoustic track featuring sampled voices and a harmonium he came across in the studio. The sampling is one of the aspects that links his first single with ‘Oxymore’, his new album, and also with his mid-1980s releases ‘Zoolook’ and ‘Musique Pour Supermarché’.

“By sampling people shouting and breathing, I was being faithful to how we were dealing with sounds at the GRM,” he says. “The core of music as an art form is not just songs, so I’ve always believed vocals could be explored and exploited in ways that don’t involve lyrics. The whole idea of ‘Oxymore’ was about me going back to how I worked during this period, so the fact that this single is coming out again is something special.”

The ‘La Cage’ / ‘Erosmachine’ single came out on the Pathé label, at that point a division of EMI, and was available only in France. The often repeated story that only 117 copies were sold is almost certainly a myth, but it is unlikely the true figure was above 1,000. Which is why mint condition discs typically sell for around £200 and why we’re delighted to be reissuing this record for the first time ever. Our reissue comes with a reconstruction of the original picture sleeve, the back of which boasts a wonderfully poetic paragraph written by Jarre’s childhood friend Max Dumas (credited as Xam Samud), describing Jarre crafting the tracks in the darkness of the GRM.

“Organ, bass guitar, drums in full force,” reads the text in English. “Lots of sticks. A whole range of percussion equipment, from the bongo to the rattle, including the flexatone and the wooden spoon. Finally, music. Mixed, ground, modulated by synthesiser, generators, filters themselves manipulated and monitored thanks to about 50 potentiometers and dials. The troglodyte magician fresh out of the ORTF’s Groupe de Recherches Musicales is there, reigning in his dark cave in the very centre of Paris. He touches everything, sees everything. The sound gushes out from the powerful speakers.”

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97 Cluster, ‘Heavenly Remixes 5 & 6’

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WANT FRIES WITH THAT?

Audio-Technica revive the Burger

Last month saw the return of Audio-Technica's legendary Sound Burger record player after a 40-year hiatus. First released in 1983 during the original Walkman craze, the Burger was the Japanese company's ambitious attempt to draw vinyl lovers into the world of portable audio.

Marketed as the Mister Disc in the US, you'll have a good time perusing some of the original promo material, with smiling models pictured sitting on park benches next to their beloved Burger. Whether anyone in the world was actually mad enough to do that with it remains doubtful, but this little player was still revered for its impressive sound. Luckily for us, Audio-Technica have been able to retain the excellent sound quality on this updated version, which now also comes with Bluetooth connectivity, USB-C charging, and a 12-hour battery life. Bag a piece of design history for £200. **audio-technica.com**

PULSE

CHOUK BWA & THE ÅNGSTRÖMERS

Haitian/Belgian electric voodoo dub

WHO?

Formed in 2012, Chouk Bwa are a Haitian group sharing the music of Vodou, a diasporic faith blending traditional West and Central African spirituality with Catholicism. In 2016, they crossed paths with The Ångströmers, two bearded Belgian producers with strong roots in European dance music. And so meet Chouk Bwa & The Ångströmers – a high-octane mash-up of hand-drum techno, ritualistic chanting and analogue wizardry.

WHY CHOUK BWA & THE ÅNGSTRÖMERS?

If what you desire is unadulterated energy, this lot have it by the bucket-load. Already adored by Kevin "The Bug" Martin, their music could fuel any club at peak time, and you might assume that's thanks to The Ångströmers. But the Belgian producers have made clear their intention of not wanting to bastardise Haitian music along Western lines, and the duo's all-analogue input is notable for its subtlety, revealing the inherent danceability of Vodou music. The techno-like pulse is played with two very real drums, culminating in propulsive rhythms and given further beans by the fè (a piece of iron), which is struck continuously by lead singer Gomez "Djopipi" Henris. Like Gnawa music in Morocco, Chouk Bwa are a testament to the ancientness of dance music, as evidenced on their scintillating new EP, 'Ayiti Kongo Dub #2'.

TELL US MORE...

Voodoo gets a bad rep. This centuries-old tradition is often misrepresented in Western narratives around malevolent spell-casting characters, a caricature which was originally disseminated by European colonialists. But voodoo is a central belief in Vodou culture, much more about positivity and sharing. A strong part of Chouk Bwa's musical mission is to dispel these lies and myths, as they reassert voodoo's true meaning through euphoric dance music, and The Ångströmers play an admirable and arresting part in that.

ISAAK LEWIS-SMITH

'Ayiti Kongo Dub #2' is out now on Bongo Joe

SCHOOL OF ELECTRONIC MUSIC

Resident archivist **Jack Dangers** is reunited with a favourite 12-inch single from Scottish synth pioneer **Thomas Leer**

Thomas Leer's '4 Movements' – a four-track 12-inch EP released in 1981 – is not particularly rare, but it's a brilliant record, and I've always loved it. I went back to it recently and wasn't disappointed. All four tracks, which are taken from the album, 'Letter From America', are fantastic.

I discovered '4 Movements' for the first time, like so much else, thanks to John Peel. He'd play something and I'd go and buy it. That's how I picked up on things like Throbbing Gristle, Cabaret Voltaire and Fad Gadget.

When the EP came out, I remember thinking Leer was using really interesting synth sounds, which I'm pretty sure are from a Korg 700S. I used one on the Meat Beat Manifesto album 'Impossible Star'. The band most famous for using the Korg 700S was probably The Cars, but it also featured on The Normal's 'TVOD' and 'Warm Leatherette', and The Human League used it on their early stuff. It was the electro-punk synth. It came out in 1974, so they were likely coming onto the second-hand market in the late 1970s for not much money.

Leer's first record was 'Private Plane' in 1978, a self-released seven-inch in a home-made photocopied cover. He was working with Robert Rental, who also put out a DIY single in 1978 called 'Paralysis'. Throbbing Gristle must have heard both and thought it'd be a good idea for the two of them to do an album together, and so 'The Bridge' was released on Industrial in 1979.

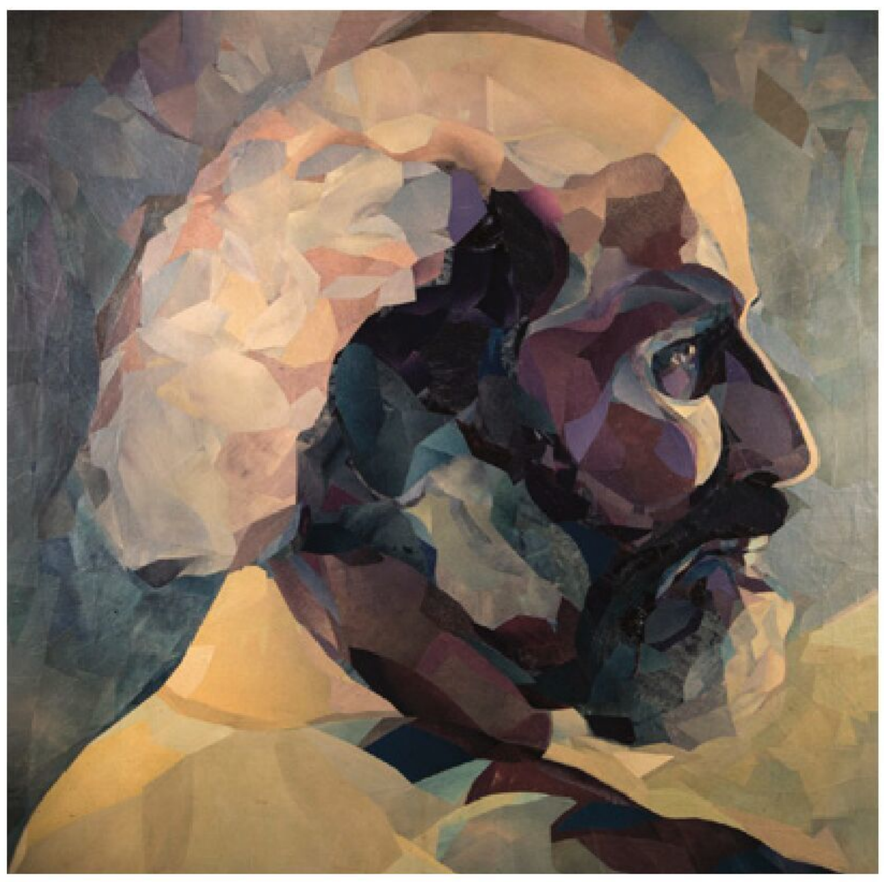
From there, Leer signed to Cherry Red, releasing '4 Movements' in 1981, followed by the albums 'Letter From America' and 'Contradictions' in 1982. After that, he moved to Arista and put out 'The Scale Of Ten', which was much more commercial – Anne Dudley scored the strings on that one. He then formed Act with Claudia Brücken. When they split towards the end of the 80s, he withdrew from the music industry until 2001, when he started releasing archive and new material on his own label Future Historic.

You should be able to find a decent copy of '4 Movements' for £10 and 'Letter From America' will set you back maybe £20. 'Contradictions' has been re-issued a few times, most recently this year by Italian label Spittle on double vinyl. For a copy of the DIY pressing of the 'Private Plane' seven-inch you're looking at between £50 and £100.

SILVER APPLE OF MY EYE

Morton Subotnick doc nearly here

'Subotnick: Portrait Of An Electronic Music Pioneer' is a fantastic documentary following Morton Subotnick as he goes about making his "multimedia chamber opera", 'Crowds And Power'. Produced by Waveshaper Media, the production company behind 2014's superb modular flick, 'I Dream Of Wires', this new film is the perfect overview of the legendary composer's life. As well as providing a lens into Subotnick's colourful and humorous day-to-day routine, there are also candid interviews with the 89-year-old, reflecting on his incredible story – from a disastrous stint in the US army during the Korean War, to founding the San Francisco Tape Music Center. Due out in early 2023, see the Waveshaper website for updates. **waveshapermedia.com**



HUMSINGER

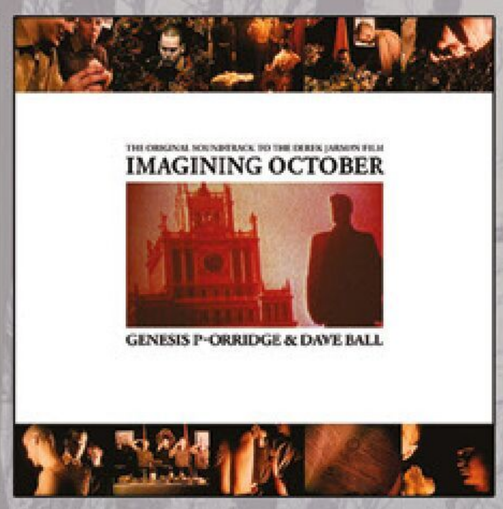
Deezer introduces novel "humming" feature

It's happened to all of us. You hear a tune and can't get it out of your head. But not only are you stuck with it – you can't even identify it. Enter music streaming platform Deezer, who have blessed us with a neat solution. Their new in-app feature SingCatcher invites you to sing, hum, or even whistle said forgotten tune into your device, and they will supposedly be able to find it. At present, it's the only streaming app with this kind of service. Whether it's enough to loosen Spotify's grip on the industry remains to be seen. **deezer.com**

A LOOK BACK AT COLD SPRING 2022 RELEASES...

LULL
That Space Somewhere CD
Isolationist Dark Ambient from Mick Harris (***Scorn / Fret***).

KOLLAPS
Until The Day I Die CD/LP
Uncompromising, authentic post-Industrial. Merciless and visceral.



GENESIS P-ORRIDGE / DAVE BALL
Imagining October 12" Etched
Derek Jarman film soundtrack.

MASCHINENZIMMER 412
[MZ.412] Malfeitor CD
Swedish Black Industrial rituals. Unavailable for over 20 years.

MERZBOW
Animal Liberation (Until Every Cage Is Empty) CD
The King of Japanoise.

DEAD VOICES ON AIR
Abrader Redux CD
Hypnotic looped rhythms / heavy ambient washes. Feat ***cEvin Key***.

BURIAL HEX
Gauze CD
Ritual Horror Electronics and Phantasmagoric Post-Industrial.

WE BE ECHO
Ceva Evi - Compleat Edition 2CD
1983 Industrial. Feat: Genesis P-Orridge. FFO Throbbing Gristle / Cabaret Voltaire.

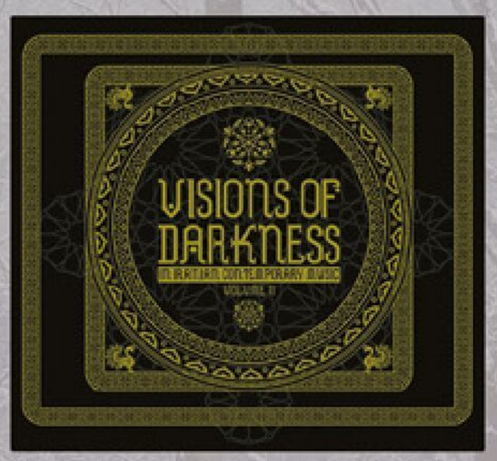
LLYN Y CWN
Du Y Moroedd CD
Glacial dark ambient recorded in Wales, Greenland & Arctic Ocean.

TENHORNEDBEAST
The Lamp Of No Light CD
Pounding doom-ambient, dark textures and heavy drones.

MASCHINENZIMMER 412
[MZ.412] Macht Durch Stimme CD
The debut release from the inventors of Swedish Black / Death Industrial

JAGATH
Svapna CD
Dark Ambient rituals created at vast, adandoned Russian industrial locations.

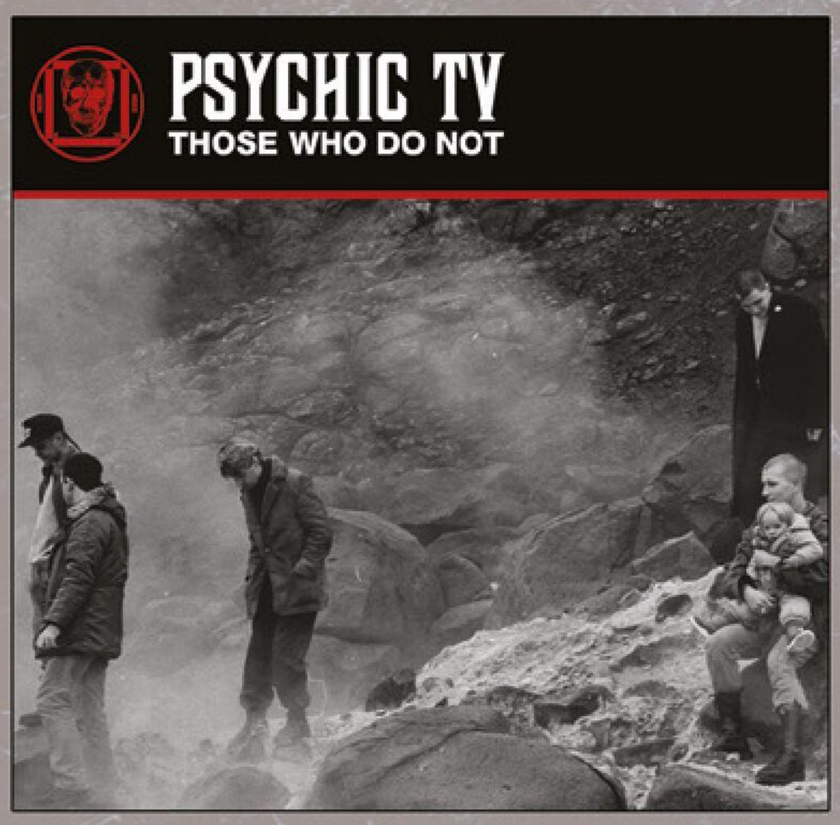
COLOSSLOTH
Promethean Meat CD
Rhythmic Industrial Noise drenched in crushing doom and esoteric electronics.



V/A Visions Of Darkness
(In Iranian Contemp. Music Vol II) 2CD
A rich chest of treasures from the Persian experimental underground.

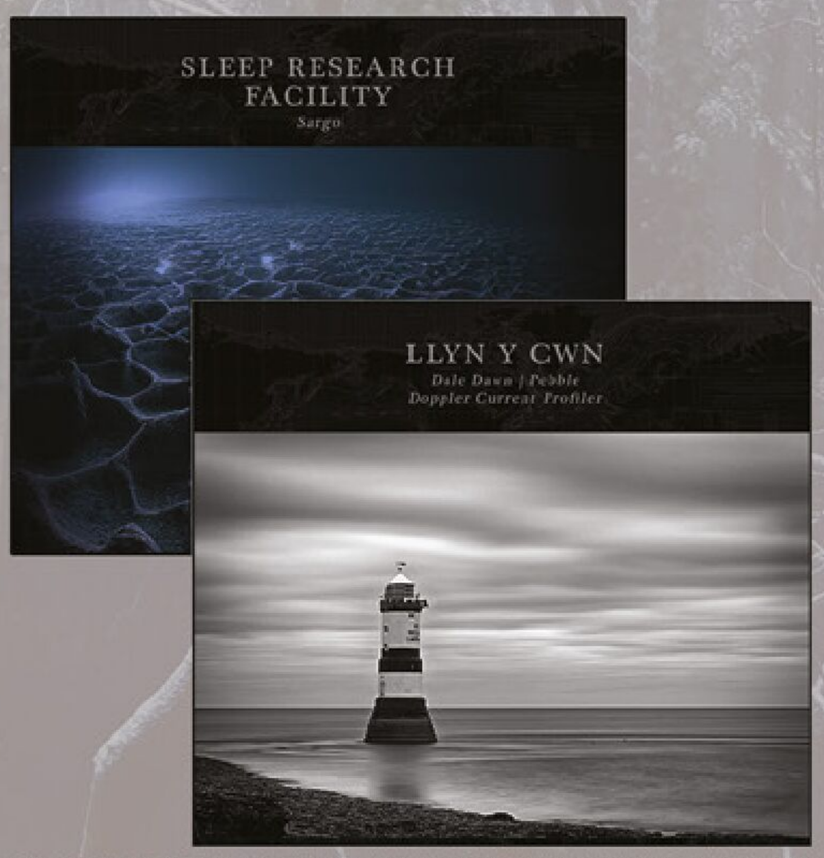
SONOLOGYST
Interdimensional CD
Isolationist dark ambient / analogue synths reminiscent of Thomas Köner.

COLD SPRING RELEASES - EARLY 2023



PSYCHIC TV
Those Who Do Not CD / 2LP
The ultimate Psychic TV experience for Psychick Youth. Recorded in Iceland. Features ***COIL***.

B.E.F.
Music For Stowaways CD / LP
Post ***HUMAN LEAGUE*** / pre-***HEAVEN 17***.
Martyn Ware, Ian Craig Marsh, Adi Newton (***CLOCK DVA***).



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ANARCHY IN THE UK

Drummer's story is a post-punk page-turner

'69 Exhibition Road' is the excellent new memoir of Dorothy Max Prior, drummer in cult post-punk outfit Rema-Rema. Featuring an eye-catching subtitle, 'Twelve True-Life Tales From The Fag End Of Punk, Porn & Performance', the book is divided into 12 standalone "episodes", with Rema-Rema's South Kensington squat as the nexus between each story. Prior lived there between 1976 and 1982, making avant-garde music while moonlighting as a photographer's model, gallery usher and "exotic dancer". In providing an eyewitness account of the UK's blossoming underground scenes, '69 Exhibition Road' is much more than just an individual's life story. It's an exuberant snapshot of this great period in British cultural history, packed with fruity anecdotes and told with a gloriously wry wit. Published this month by Strange Attractor, you can order a hardback copy now for £18. **strangeattractor.co.uk**

SCIENCE FAIR

Hands-on music exhibition opens its doors

Get yourself down to Manchester's Science & Industry Museum for 'Turn It Up: The Power Of Music', a new exhibition exploring "the science of music's mysterious hold over us". Featuring a musical robot which is capable of playing and improvising with humans, it's also a chance to test out the Pyrophone, an organ powered by flames, as well as Imogen Heap's popular MiMU gloves, a wearable musical interface which lets you use hand gestures to control production software. There's also a host of other weird and wonderful instruments to get your mitts on, so start looking for the next free space in your diary. 'Turn It Up' runs until 21 May 2023. Tickets are just £8. **scienceandindustrymuseum.org.uk**

NEEDS MUST

Freewheeling through time and space, **Kris Needs** continues his adventures in sound. This month: **Erick Legrand**

The day before November's Bandcamp Friday, Nina Walsh asked if I could write words to accompany 'Mes Amis', the fourth album she's created in five years highlighting the extraordinary music of her late partner Erick Legrand, who passed away in 2011.

Nina met French-Algerian drummer "Mad Erick", as he was known, at messiness-prone London hotspot, the Fortress.

"He was a complete lunatic and absolute trouble, but I fell for him. I knew he only had a certain amount of time left, but we didn't know how much, so Erick lived his life to the absolute max. We had a lot of fun and learned a lot together."

Going through Erick's convoluted archive (named the Akashic Library of Sound by Nina and her studio partner Andrew Weatherall) presented a brain-twisting challenge because "Erick's filing was so atrocious".

Before his departure, he had asked Nina to make sure she did something with his music. She recalls the early days of The Woodleigh Research Facility, the outfit she started with Andrew.

"Erick became the invisible third member when we began to delve into his hard drive," she says. "Literally doors and doors flew open in the badly filed corridors of recordings and programming Erick had squirrelled away over his 20-odd years of creating music. With my own 20-odd years of amassing multitrack tapes in messy file corridors, WRF was born. Erick was almost always there somewhere in the noms de plume Andrew and I had."

'Mes Amis' presents 14 songs Erick composed and titled in honour of friends, family and dogs, and follows 'Delta 32', '11:11' and 'Second Machine From The Sun'. His unruly muse at full anarchic throttle is wrangled by Nina into this startling labour of love, providing vivid insights into Erick's "slightly distorted yet beautiful mind" and also her recording methods with Andrew.

Shimmering like a lightsaber, 'Glwadys' ignites the hedonistic energy that powers each track with the tower-toppling force of Godzilla's stiffie busting out of its monster thong, headed heavenwards as strings and brass soar and subterranean pleasure sparks spring to life. Several tracks evoke Joe Meek traversing the futuristic spaceways that manifested in 'Telstar', including 'Petitpooh', mysterioso organ-lathered 'Heidi', and 'Mother' morphing into motorik. Like an ultimate potted Erick explosion, 'Whitney' churns Suicide-esque chain-gang malevolence into Birthday Party guitar/bass pyrotechnics.

Of course, there's a suitably atmospheric piece called 'Nina', 'Droog' is named after her much-missed doggie, and 'Raymond' homages Erick's father (who recently passed away), an ocean-sprayed grand finale to the most original and untethered musical fry-up released this year.

By the time this column appears I might well have moved to Dorset. A new chapter begins. Happy Christmas!

'Mes Amis' is available via ericklegrand.bandcamp.com

SOUNDS OF THE UNIVERSE

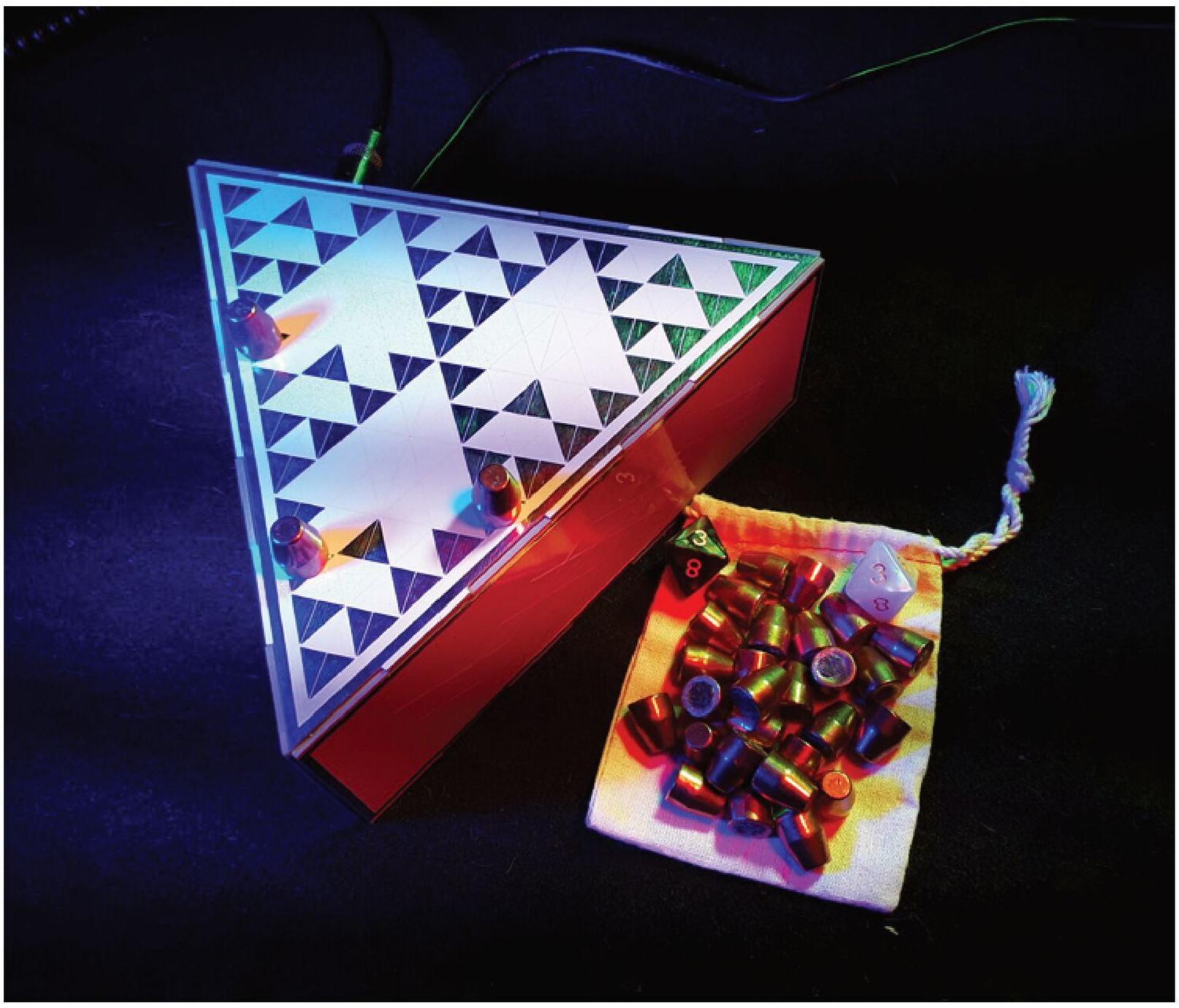
Sequencer for divining the cosmos

The Melody Oracle is a curious new instrument that promises to channel the wavelength of the cosmos through sound.

Designed and hand-assembled in the US by indie manufacturer A Magic Pulsewave Esoteric Electronics, the company categorises this device as a "melorhythmic" sequencer, inviting users to place "melorhythmic funnels" (otherwise known as metal cones) onto its game board-style interface so the noises you generate can "resonate with the melorhythmic wavelengths of the universe". Two eight-sided dice are also included to "invoke the endless song of cosmic order and chaos", because why not?

One unit costs $333 – though there's no mention of cosmic assistance with that bit. Order one by emailing the manufacturers.

melodyoracle.com



PLAYED CYMRU

Cardiff listening bar is up and running

Situated in the Plasnewydd area of Cardiff, Paradise Garden became Wales' first ever listening bar when its doors opened in October. Featuring a state-of-the-art sound system, a DJ booth fitted into an old kitchen, and a full-sized yurt in the back garden, founders David Bull and Esther Taylor hope to make a positive impact on Cardiff's burgeoning music scene.

"We wanted to make a space to celebrate some of the amazing creativity in and outside of Cardiff that isn't being represented anywhere in the city currently," explains Bull. "It's our own spin on the intimate listening bar concept, which London has really embraced, but making it more relaxed and DIY to suit a Cardiff audience. We're hoping to fill a bit of a cultural void in the city, which was particularly felt after the closure of Gwdihw."

Bull and Taylor have already planned an eclectic schedule of live music and DJs with the aim of promoting diversity and to provide "a space for those on the musical fringes". Among the artists who have already graced its stage include Welsh rapper L E M F R E C K, Bristol's modular synth queen Surgeons Girl and experimental electronic act, Shreddies.

"With so many new projects emerging and flourishing here, it's great for us to be able to to help nurture this," adds Bull. Be sure to check it out, if you're in the area.
instagram.com/paradisegardencdf

IN THE PIPELINE

Music venue support grant opens

It's a tough ol' world for live music at the moment, compounded by a number of factors not limited to Brexit, rising inflation and the pandemic. With all that in mind, it's welcome news that the Music Venue Trust have launched a brand new grant scheme for smaller venues. In partnership with The National Lottery, and part-funded by ticket sales from the Revive Live programme, the Pipeline Investment Fund offers grants of up to £5,000 to grassroots venues across the country. The grant is open to all venues and organisations as long as they meet any of the three criteria of a grassroots space. Find more information on how to apply online. **musicvenuetrust.com**

UNDER THE INFLUENCE

From Green Man festival to Depeche Mode and Vic Reeves, Pictish Trail's **Johnny Lynch** reveals his foremost influences

INTERVIEW: CARL GRIFFIN

WELSH MOUNTAIN SPIRIT

"Green Man has changed my life. The biggest audience I play to every year is here, and I honestly don't know if I'd still be doing music if it wasn't for the festival. Twenty years ago, it felt as if a loose group of friends had managed to pull together something unlikely but incredible, during a dial-up internet age of message boards and rudimentary chat forums – not at all like today! The sense of togetherness that was born at those first few gatherings was absolutely transformative.

"The confidence boost we felt, especially when The Fence Collective [Fence Records artists] was coming together, gave us the motivation and the sense that what we were doing was right. The fact that folks knew we even existed and were excited to see us was all we needed. The organiser, Ben Coleman, has been so supportive throughout, and made such a difference to many people's lives, that I thought I'd write a song dedicated to the event, called 'Green Mountain'. Maybe it can become a hymn, performed each year!"

FEELING THE FUNK

"Of all the inspirational live sets I've witnessed over the years at Green Man, among the most memorable and exuberant was the Alexis Taylor-led tribute to [pioneering Nigerian funk musician] William Onyeabor. They performed with a big all-star cast that included Money Mark, as the hitherto unknown Atomic Bomb Band – and boy, talk about harnessing the collective spirit of the performance! People realised they were witnessing something genuinely one-off, and it felt electric.

"It reminded me of how exciting music can be when it's a little bit off the cuff and not rehearsed to death – that's definitely one of the things I try to capture as Pictish Trail."

ILLUSTRATION: JOEL BENJAMIN

EVOLUTIONARY MODE

"What a band Depeche Mode are. Fletch's sudden shock passing really affected me, and I've been listening to their albums a lot lately. There's something untouchable about the early Vince Clarke era – those incredible melodic synth hooks of his and that primal approach he had of using synths like a rock band uses electric guitars.

"But the way they transformed themselves into something so different from their formative period knocks me out. Just think about how they managed to evolve to the point of creating 'Songs Of Faith And Devotion' – a weird gothic gospel masterpiece! How the hell did they manage that?"

BIG NIGHTS OUT

"Vic Reeves' genius is to be both cerebral and surreal, but also daft and universally connecting. He and Bob Mortimer have been a huge influence over the years. There's such a massive undercurrent of self-deprecating humour running through what they do – a prevailing element of life in the north-east of England, where they're from – and it's so endearing, fluent and real.

"The ideas on shows like 'Big Night Out', 'Bang, Bang, It's Reeves And Mortimer' and 'The Weekenders' are so complex and well thought-out. They manage to capture the elusive 'energy of the demo', something many musicians aim for, but seldom achieve. Vic and Bob have that in spades, and it often goes unnoticed."

ISLAND LIFE

"Moving to the Isle of Eigg in the Inner Hebrides has been life-changing in so many ways. It's a 'green' island in every respect – fully off-grid, community-owned and entirely self-sufficient. Everyone there wants change to happen and contributes to this incredible collective spirit. Each household has a daily 5kw energy consumption limit, for example, so sustainability and environmental sensitivity is a very conscious and real thing.

"I'm incredibly proud of the fact that the last Howlin' Fling festival I ran there used up a grand total of £19 worth of the island's electricity supply, which all comes from renewable energy. Are we the greenest festival in the country, or just the most cheapskate?"

CHARTING NEW ROUTES

"Running the Lost Map label from Eigg is as important to me as making my own music as Pictish Trail. The imprint actually started at Green Man back in 2013. Fence Records had just collapsed – in a really catastrophic way that was quite heartbreaking, in all honesty – but in the aftermath, the Fence artists gravitated to Lost Map, so naturally that gave me the strength to carry on.

"Lost Map is about friendship, mutual respect and being inspired by different approaches and unique musicianship. Every time I listen to an album we've released, like Ed Dowie's 'The Uncle Sold' – a beautiful and bizarre art-pop record – it inspires me and feeds what I do, musically. The same goes for the other Lost Map artists, like Alabaster DePlume, Rozi Plain and an exciting synthpop duo called Free Love – all of them are such a privilege to work with.

"I run the label with my best pal, Kate Lazda, and let me tell you, being able to do that is the most joyous thing in the world."

Pictish Trail's latest album, 'Island Family', is out now on Fire

SKETCH ARTIST

Make music on the go with Ableton app

Note is the new pocket-sized companion to Ableton's lauded digital audio workstation, Ableton Live, designed for producers who want to sketch out ideas, map beats, record samples and much more, all while on the go. Featuring a grid-based Session View layout, it's possible to audition combinations of musical layers and track structures, experiment with loops and create variations on ideas. The remarkably powerful melodic and drum samplers on offer also enable recording, cutting and pitching from within its compact but user-friendly graphic interface. Another cool feature lets you seamlessly lift projects from Note into the full Ableton Live software environment once you're back in the studio. Available exclusively for iPhone and iPad, you can download Note for just £4.99. Just make sure you don't miss your stop. **ableton.com**

MOVIE STAR

Róisín Murphy makes her acting debut

Former frontwoman of Moloko, now turned Mercury-nominated solo star, Róisín Murphy recently made her screen debut in 'The Bastard Son & The Devil Himself', a British fantasy drama series adapted for Netlix from 'Half Bad', Sally Green's young adult novel.

The series was created by Joe Barton ('Giri/Haji') and executive-produced by Andy Serkis and Jonathan Cavendish. The story is set in a fictional London where humans and witches live side by side, with Murphy playing a witch named Mercury.

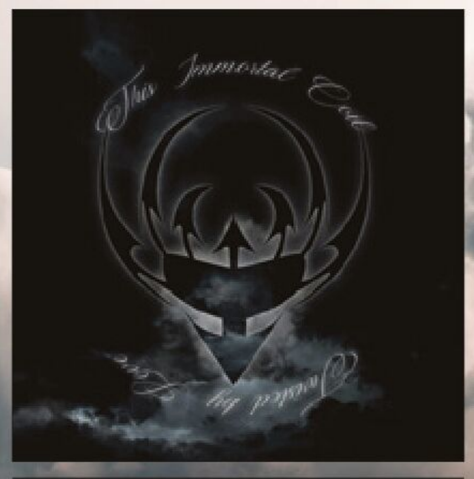
"She's glamorous, she's two-faced… she's a good part in that Bette Davis type way," Murphy says of her character. Early reviews suggest that Murphy is as distinctive an actor as she is a singer, so this probably won't be the last we see of her in front of a TV camera. **netflix.com**

This Immortal Coil

«The most extra-ordinary, beautiful, and moving re-interpretations of Coil I have ever heard!»
Peter Christopherson, COIL

This Immortal Coil
The World Ended A Long Time Ago
CD/2[LP]/DL/BOX

This Immortal Coil
The Dark Age Of Love
(2022 reissue)
CD/2[LP]/DL/BOX



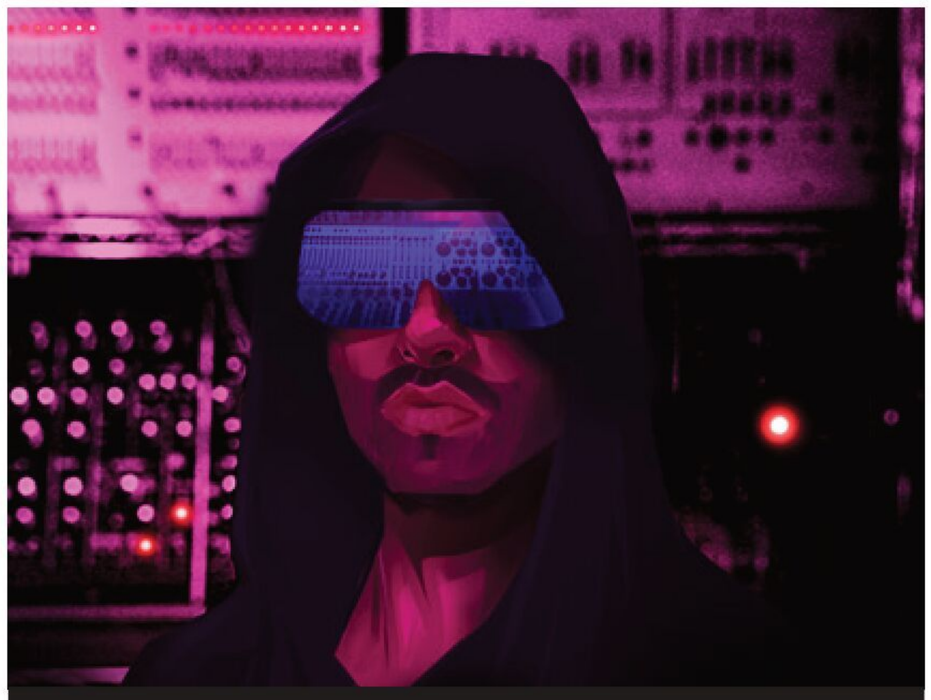
This Immortal Coil
Twisted By Love
(bonus album)
DL/BOX

This Immortal Coil
The World Ended A Long Time Ago

With :
Shannon Wright - David Chalmin
Matt Elliott - Christine Ott - Aho Ssan
Gaspar Claus - Aidan Baker (Nadja)
Franck Laurino (Zëro)
Kristoffer Rygg (ULVER)
Ole Alexander Halstensgård (ULVER)
Stian Westerhus (ULVER)
Massimo Pupillo (Zü)
Mattia Cipolli
Elisa Bognetti - Stefano Michelotti (Zü)
Francesco Bolognini - Márton Csókás
Ivan Chiossone (Zëro)
Eric Aldéa (Zëro)

https://thisimmortalcoil.bandcamp.com
https://icidailleurs.fr

Ici d'ailleurs
KARTEL



PULSE

JAY WIRES

Depeche-hued electronic catharsis

WHO?

Jay Wires is an electronic musician and songwriter from New York. After spending his teenage years absorbed in the music of Depeche Mode, New Order and Erasure, a young Wires persuaded his folks to buy him a synth for his 14th birthday, and off he went. "I realised I could record full songs alone on a synthesiser with a computer that would fix all my wrong notes and sloppy timing," says Wires. "I thank Vince Clarke and Martin Gore for ruining my mom's dream of having a doctor for a son."

WHY JAY WIRES?

Describing his distinctive, emotional outpourings as "electropop therapy", the four songs on debut EP 'Kaboom!' were inspired by the social isolation of lockdown and a break-up. Telling the story of a relationship approaching crisis point, 'Candle In The Night' and 'Time And Space' contain sensitive, loving lyrics framed by warm, evolving synths and brittle melodies. On title track 'Kaboom!', we are thrust into the dead centre of Wires' anguish, perfectly evoking the savage disorientation and disarray of a painful parting. Final track 'Breathe' is muted, reflective and hopeful, inspired by a walk in a park in Astoria, Queens. "I try to base the sound of the song not just on the feelings I had at the time, but also the environment," explains Wires. "It's all about painting an actual picture that takes me back to that particular place and time."

TELL US MORE...

Fast forward to today and, alongside making music, Wires works for a vintage synth dealer. It's a job which puts him in touch with many of the discerning electronic musicians who inspired him in the first place, spending every day testing and playing incredible equipment.

MAT SMITH

'Kaboom!' is out now on Yes Trigger Music

TIME MACHINE

DAF and Der Plan legend **Kurt Dahlke** – aka Pyrolator – reflects on how he ended up performing at an Argentinian "future discotheque"

WORDS: JEREMY ALLEN

In the late 1970s, German society was perceived to be breaking down. The German Autumn left citizens scared they'd be blown up by terrorists, 'Zoo Station', Christiane F's memoir, caused concern that the youth were all becoming heroin addicts, and in 1978, three accidents at nuclear facilities created a collective fear of death by radiation. Out of this angst and paranoia came Pyrolator, a new kind of protest singer who didn't actually sing.

"Yes, 'Inland', my first solo album was a silent protest," says Kurt Dahlke, the man behind the metaphorical mask. "Because the singer-songwriter protest generation failed, in a way.

Over the last four-and-a-bit decades, the Düsseldorf musician has been a facilitator as well as a creator. In 1978, he was a founding member of Deutsch Amerikanische Freundschaft (DAF), but left the following year to form Der Plan. In 1980, with Der Plan bandmates Frank Fenstermacher and Moritz Reichelt, he created the Ata Tak label, which was pivotal in the Neue Deutsche Welle movement, releasing works by Die Tödliche Doris, Andreas Dorau and DAF, among others.

"For me, Chrislo Haas was the true inventor of the sound of DAF as he brought all the sequencers and the body music," says Dahlke. "I'm glad I left because that wasn't my sound."

The 64-year-old has never been afraid of EBM, though the music he's made with Der Plan, A Certain Frank and as Pyrolator has tended to drift more into dreamlike and esoteric territory.

This brings us neatly to Ficción Disco (Fiction Disco), a 10-day event like no other held in Buenos Aires in 1991, which Dahlke helped to create with the Goethe-Institut, the worldwide German cultural association which has commissioned him on several occasions for workshops and concerts.

The foundations of the Ficción Disco can be traced back to South Korea in 1988, when the Goethe-Institut set up the Kunstdisco (art disco) to run in

tandem with the Olympic Games in Seoul. As well as dancing, there were 22 food stalls, where patrons could try different German nibbles with chopsticks. Naturally, the German media had a field day.

"In Korea, it was great," remembers Dahlke. "But the press wrote quite negatively, saying things like, 'Why is Germany financing a discotheque?'."

Undeterred, the Goethe-Institut decided that Dionysian dancing in Argentina was a fine way to spread the German language, though things would have to be done slightly differently this time if they were to stem the vituperation of the poisonous press. So in 1991, the organisation pitched up in Buenos Aires for its next soft power move. What transpired was way more ludicrous than what had taken place in Seoul.

Six musicians (three German, three South American) plus some artists and authors, were given creative carte blanche to produce pieces on a theme titled "The Future Of The Discotheque". As well as Pyrolator, the team included obscure electronic composer Hans Werner Freiherr Von Brachwitz and popular Argentine singer Daniel Melero. The artists were encouraged to speculate on what a disco might look like in 30 years, and the only limit would be their imagination. Sadly, much of what was created has all but vanished.

"If you search for Ficción Disco on the internet now, very little comes up, except for maybe on Discogs," says Dahlke, referring to his seven-inch of 'Ficción Disco' from 1992. It featured 'Fragmente Der Undeutlichkeit' on one side, a symphonic pop track with the words of the playwright Botho Strauss, and 'Narziss' on the flip, with a text by French poet and philosopher Paul Valéry recited over a squelchy techno groove.

"My idea at that time was to get people dancing to avant-garde music and literature," says Dahlke.

For the Ficción Disco itself, there was phantasmagorical madness in the form of crucifixion poses and writhing bodies, presented by Argentine performance group La Organización Negra. Sounds like quite the spectacle.

"There were 20 naked men onstage but everything was totally dark," explains Dahlke. "Then the light flashed for five seconds, and they formed a kind of ancient painting where you saw these naked bodies performing. It was really impressive!"

Elsewhere, political demonstrations were held involving the ironic burning of books, and performers swam in giant aquariums.

"Democracy had only been restored in the country for about eight years," says Dahlke.

Sound artist Michael Fahres, meanwhile, played music featuring field recordings of Lola Kiepja, a shaman from one of Patagonia's lost tribes, and upstairs were incongruous booths where attendees could consult a medium and a cross-dressing lawyer.

"The medium was about 75," remembers Dahlke. "When we asked her what the discotheque would look like in 30 years, it turned out she didn't know what a discotheque was!"

These arty and bizarre antics attracted a full house every night, meaning it wasn't always easy to get a drink, even during the quieter moments.

"In front of the bar was a labyrinth made out of glass, so you had to find your way through it to get served," recalls Dahlke. "If you were drunk, you couldn't do that anymore."

Thirty years on from Ficción Disco, the future of the discotheque is not as it was envisaged. Covid-19 has taken a severe toll on the nighttime industry and the disco is in existential jeopardy. Maybe if nightclubs were more like Ficción Discos, then more of us would be tempted out – and we could learn to speak German to boot. Just as soon as we made it back from the bar, natürlich.

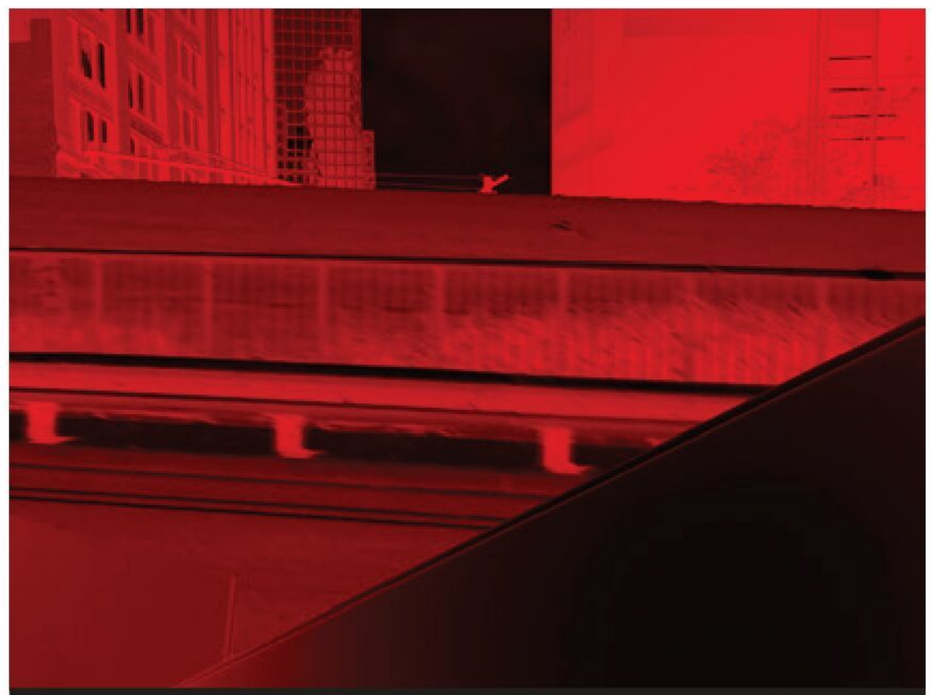
Pyrolator's 'Niemandsland' album is out now on Bureau B

A SOUND CAUSE

Machines to support Ukraine

Japanese synth developer Black Corporation have lent support to the people of Ukraine by launching a custom-coloured edition of their イセーニン (pronounced "ee-seh-nin") synthesiser. Usually priced at $3,999, this blue and yellow-adorned version of the analogue eight-voice synth is limited to a run of just five units, each with a fixed price of $10,000. And there are still four to be had…

"All money will go to a non-military-related charity in Ukraine," says the company. "Please get in touch if you want to purchase one. We don't mind if you're ready to pay more than the expected price." **black-corporation.com**



PULSE

OSCCR

Emo synthscapes signal a wunderkind

WHO?

How did your teenager spend lockdown? Honing their 'Fortnite' skills? Claiming that the Wi-Fi wasn't working so they could avoid live-streamed lessons? How about making a highly accomplished electronic album when they should have been doing their homework? That's how OSCCR, a 17-year-old electronic musician from Brooklyn, spent his.

WHY OSCCR?

His self-released debut 'Stasis' landed in June 2021, and it isn't what you might expect from a teenager operating in electronic music. Featuring deeply melodic, highly complex instrumental pieces, the album is full of memorable passages carrying an emotionally powerful sentiment.

"I make instrumental music which takes inspiration from my personal life and emotional experiences," says OSCCR. His bio and messages might be written in lower-case text, but his music, like his alias, is resoundingly bold and upper-case. 'Tired Sick And Irritable', the first single to be taken from his second album, 'Emotional Wreck', is a restless, insistent, regimented banger overlaid with ricocheting percussion. Its intricate synth patterns and rich bass tones suggest OSCCR has been freely raiding his dad's Vangelis collection (more on that in a moment). Its follow-up, the arresting, minor symphony that is 'Fish Out Of Water', is led by a central hook that is resolute yet beautifully uncertain, guaranteed to give goosebumps. Meanwhile, the album's title track shimmers like some elusive heat haze, all elegiac vocal textures, non-linear rhythms and spirals of haunting synth melodies.

TELL US MORE...

Aside from some uncomfortable parent-teacher video calls to explain the lack of home study, his parents couldn't have been prouder. Then again, when your father is Erasure's Vince Clarke, perhaps you can understand why. OSCCR's first single 'Dust' was an inter-generational collaboration between OSCCR and his old man. Go and check him out .

MAT SMITH

Osccr's debut album, 'Emotional Wreck', is out now

RABBITING ON

Finally, an Xmas party to get excited about

If office Christmas parties aren't for you, you might want to look at what venerable publisher White Rabbit Books have planned. Their 'Nightmare Before Christmas' series is a double-bill event being held at The Social in central London on 14 and 15 December. The first night will feature author talks, including one with Fat White Family's Lias Saoudi, (who recently published his band's rollercoaster history, 'Ten Thousand Apologies') and Mogwai's Stuart Braithwaite in conversation with David Keenan ('This Is Memorial Device'). The next night is more for the dancers out there, with DJs playing across both floors of The Social. Jennifer Lucy Allan, author of last year's 'The Foghorn's Lament', is one of those on deck duty. Tickets are £8 per night or £12 for both. **whiterabbitbooks.co.uk**

BRIGHT SPARKS

Scheme looks to train up young tastemakers

A new start-up called Odd Numbers is aiming to nurture "the next generation of music entrepreneurs" and have begun taking applications. In partnership with youth culture media platform Basement Approved, Odd Numbers will try to help young companies grow and develop via free, structured mentoring sessions with industry bigwigs. Successful applicants will be given four one-to-one sessions, as well as financial support to help their businesses grow.

Founded by A&R man Nick Worthington (ex-XL Recordings) and entertainment lawyer Kieran Jay, Odd Numbers will initially take on just three candidates, though they will be welcoming more in the spring. **oddnumbersmusic.co.uk**

LANDMARKS

Jim Jupp mulls over 'Farmer's Angle', his debut Belbury Poly EP from 2004 – the release which launched the iconic Ghost Box label and also kickstarted 21st century hauntology

INTERVIEW: BOB FISCHER

"A lot of what I've done as Belbury Poly has been inspired by my memories of TV library music and theme tunes. They're probably false memories, but I really wanted to recreate that atmosphere of 1970s afternoons off school absorbed in programmes 'For Schools And Colleges'. It was an era when we just watched whatever was on TV, because there were only three channels! That opened the door to all kinds of weird stuff you wouldn't normally choose to see. Educational shows, programmes about engineering and science, folk tales and nature documentaries.

"And 'Farmer's Angle' definitely came from growing up in the HTV region, which covered Wales and the West Country. There was a lot of agricultural programming, but what really stuck in my mind was the theme from 'One Man And His Dog'! I honestly think that's the template for Belbury Poly – that gentle, pastoral, electronic sound.

"In the 1990s, a couple of things triggered those memories. There were retro-futurist bands like Broadcast and Plone – they excited me. I'd fallen out of love with indie bands and got a bit bored with dance music, but those groups seemed to connect with that first excitement of playing around in a synth band at school. But even then, all that weird old telly was something I'd never really thought about as having creative potential. Not until Boards Of Canada appeared in the late 1990s. And then it was, 'Oh god! All this stuff! This *world*!'. Not long after, there was [spoof science show] 'Look Around You' on TV as well, so there was definitely something in the air. The time felt right.

"I'd been in bands before and got a bit tired of it. But I'd built my own home studio, and when I started recording what became 'Farmer's Angle', there was a moment when I suddenly thought, 'Nobody will like this, but it's the best music I've ever made and I'm enjoying doing it'. And it all came flowing out, it was a real epiphany. I was living in Mile End in London, and I had

Farmer's Angle

a wobbly set-up – a spare room with a barely working old computer, a cheap Akai desktop sampler and the synth I'd had since I was a kid. But somehow the lo-fi equipment gave those recordings a sound I still really like.

"The 'Farmer's Angle' track itself came from discussions with Julian [House, Ghost Box co-founder]. It felt like what we were doing was somehow connected to what's now called 'folk horror' – those weird 1970s TV serials, Hammer Horror movies, even the songs on shows like 'Play School'. That whole world of folk music, horror, science and synthesisers all seemed to make sense and lent itself to the imaginary TV themes on the EP. 'Wildspot', for example, is my memory of how a wildlife programme might have sounded. 'The Eleventh House' is more Dennis Wheatley territory, and the vocal samples are from 'To The Devil A Daughter'. They're a bit buried because I recorded them with a microphone in front of the TV!

"And 'Cool Air'… the title came from a short story by HP Lovecraft, which is about a physician who lives beyond the point of death by keeping his New York apartment at sub-zero temperatures. He eventually decomposes in a bath full of ice! It's a very odd tale, written in a very decadent, flowery way and was inspired by Arthur Machen's story, 'The Novel Of The White Powder'. While I've never been sure what the music itself would actually soundtrack, there's something very eerie about its atmosphere.

"As I was working on 'Farmer's Angle', Julian was crystallising the ideas that became The Focus Group. We'd have a regular weekly meeting at my house amid all the old synths and instruments. Although we were meant to be recording music together, we never did! Those meetings became world-building sessions, and that was when the ideas behind Ghost Box began to really take shape. The visual identity, and the concept of the label being based in this fictional place – Belbury.

"We never wanted to provide a map of Belbury – it's not a fantasy novel, with the vicarage there and the hospital there. But we'd put an image on a back sleeve, or a reference in a song title, or a little footnote in the sleeve notes. We built the Ghost Box world that way, through hints.

"Going back to our teens, Julian and I were both into HP Lovecraft, and we'd always been interested in the way he did that. At the time, making a record look like a book felt really unusual! I'm not saying Julian was the first person to do it, but within a few years it had become a cliche to reimagine any record sleeve you'd ever seen as a Penguin Books design. We just wanted to feel like our releases could have been a teaching aid, from an era when schools were supplied with educational records to help with lessons.

"We thought if we could sell 20 copies of our CDs, that would be brilliant. I used to burn them at home on demand. I worked in an architect's office in central London at the time, and I'd always have a big duffel bag full of padded envelopes which I'd lug down to the Post Office in my lunch hour, with everyone grumbling in the queue behind me.

"I still feel an exciting connection to those early recordings, and to the memories I was trying to resurrect from my own past. We're now intending to re-release everything. We're starting with 'Farmer's Angle', and they'll continue – maybe one every two or three months. Our aim has never been to release, sell and delete. We've been accused of it, but we're not in the business of making our records so obscure that people can't get them – we're just a small label with limited manufacturing means. Ideally, I'd love them all to be available all the time."

The reissued 'Farmer's Angle' EP is out now on Ghost Box

SOUND IDEA

Instant camera icons take on audio

It seems Polaroid are no longer content with remaining in the world of photography, having recently announced their foray into portable audio. Dubbed the Polaroid Players, each of their four new speakers on offer promises dynamic sound response, Bluetooth and wireless pairing connectivity. What's more, you're able to choose your preferred unit from a rather splashy set of colours. The Polaroid P1 Music Player is the smallest and cheapest of the lot ("about the size of a refreshing apple", say Polaroid of the £50 device), while the largest, the P4, is in fruit scale terms "about the size of a small watermelon", and is priced at £260. The tailored Polaroid Music App promises to complete the experience, with user-specific music channels, and more. **polaroid.com**

HAIKU HEAVEN

Imaginative indie label Naviar approaches its ninth birthday

Over the past nine years, Naviar Records have managed to carve out their own niche corner of literature-inspired music, with each of their releases responding directly to haikus – short-form Japanese poetry.

"It's an example of just how much life there can be in one little idea," says founder Marco Sebastiano Alessi.

"Like many others, when I finished my studies and got my first job, I struggled to find the time to make music, so I started thinking about ways to encourage my creativity through regular music challenges. There were a couple of great schemes, like Marc Weidenbaum's 'Disquiet Junto', an active online community of weekly music/sonic projects, but I wanted to find a less structured idea with more freedom for interpretation."

Marco says basing a label around haikus was an "aha! moment" that came to him while reading a haiku book and listening to music.

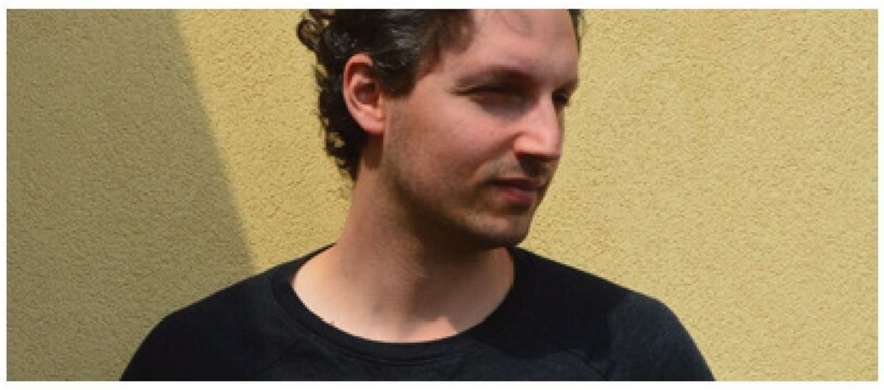
"I realised there was clearly a relationship between these two art forms. I was still trying to figure out the structure of Naviar's challenges, but the idea of developing a community based on experimental music and Japanese poetry seemed very appealing to me from the start."

Releasing haiku-inspired music since January 2014, the label have gone from strength to strength. This month, London's Cafe Oto hosted the fifth edition of the Naviar Haiku Fest, featuring performances from Simon McCorry, Manja Risti, Audio Obscura, Leon Clowes, Encym & George Crowley, and Daniel Green. There's more exciting news on the horizon too.

An event in Berlin is confirmed for the end of 2023 and another is on the cards for Wagga Wagga, Australia. And it appears Marco isn't finished yet.

"Though still in the early stages, I'm transforming my parents' old apartment into a recording studio, which I'll make available as a creative retreat in the Italian countryside for members of Naviar's community."

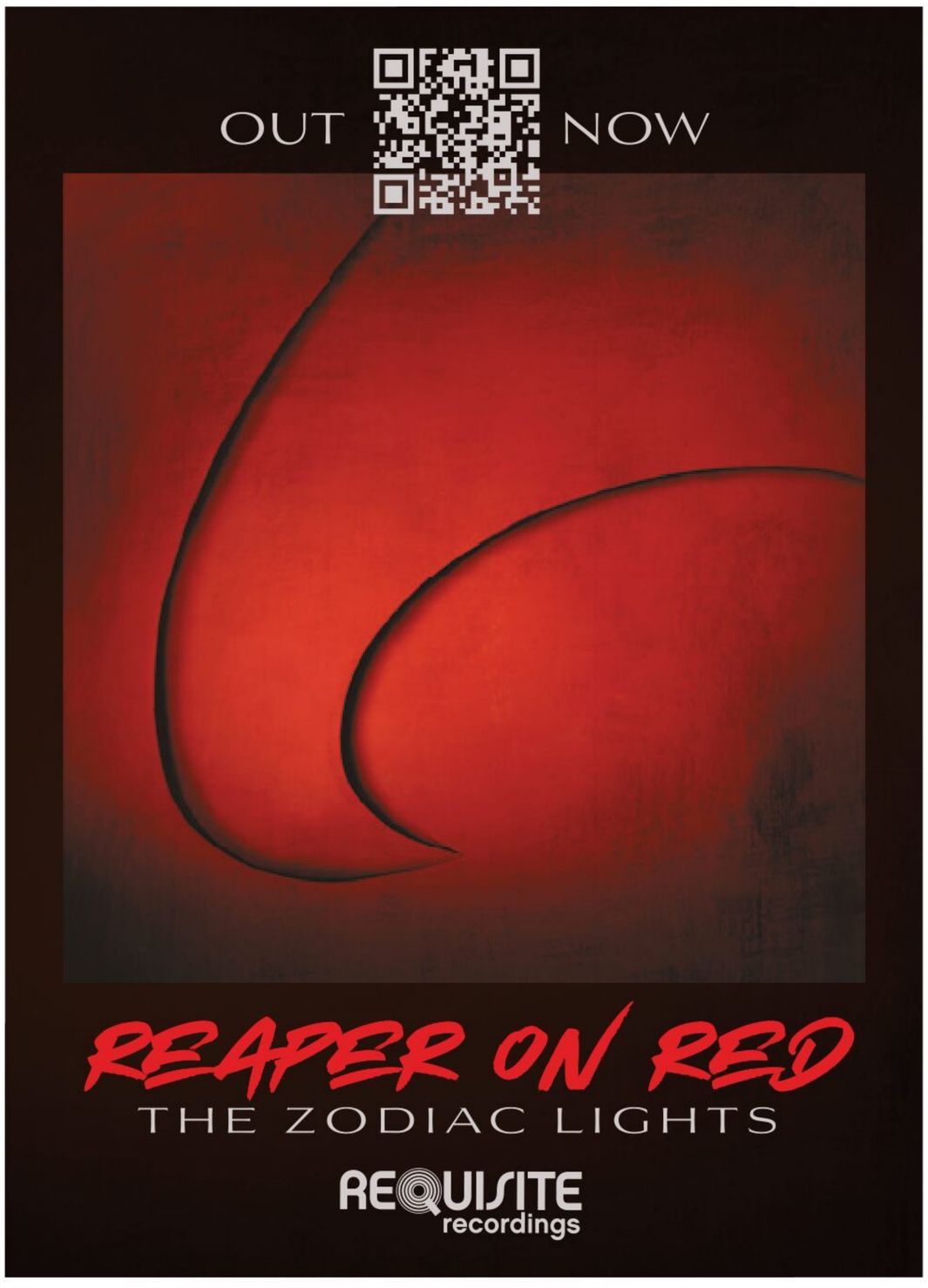
Well, how about that. **naviarrecords.com**



NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM

Cultural hotspot reaches out to clubbers

Legendary London venue Fabric has become the world's first nightclub-in-residence at the Museum of London. The partnership kicked-off in October with a one-off performance from artist Tai Shani, featuring an original live score by Shani's long-term collaborators, Maxwell Sterling and Richard Fearless. Though the Museum is temporarily closing while it relocates to a new building in West Smithfield (directly opposite where Fabric is based, don't you know), the two venues say they will collaborate again in 2024 to mark the club's 25th anniversary and to celebrate its continuing impact on London's nightlife and music scene. **fabriclondon.com**



THE ORAM AWARDS 2022

This year's **Oram Awards,** the annual event celebrating female and gender minority artists who are pushing the limits of electronic sound, has come to a conclusion. And the 2022 winners are...

INTERVIEWS: ISAAK LEWIS-SMITH

AMBLE SKUSE

Describe your work in one sentence
"Making noises, using speech, finding the flow, connecting with something deep inside me."

We should listen to...
"I'm probably most proud of my album 'What News' with Alasdair Roberts and David McGuinness."

Who would you like to toast?
"Everyone! There's a huge community of wonderful people who have had my back. The most important thing is connecting with others and supporting them, because being an artist is a tough and lonely thing to do."

What's your best bit of career advice?
"Probably, 'You can't afford to fuck about', which I took to mean, 'Always go for the thing you want, don't waste time, don't half-do things, life is short'. Music-wise, it's probably to listen back to your stuff with your eyes closed and make handwritten notes on what you want to change."

Your dream collaboration?
"I love working with traditional musicians, as I feel the spooky electronics really work well with their traditional stories. I also do stuff with Celtic languages, so Gaelic singers like Kathleen McInnes would be wonderful."

And a New Year's resolution?
"To make a new album with Ali and David, to finish writing up my PhD, and to swim in the sea more."

AMY CUTLER

Describe your work in one sentence
"Drawing on an unusual background as a geographer, I create electronic and analogue A/V performances, interactive installations and tape releases often related to ecology and emotion."

We should listen to...
"My album 'The End (Also Ends) Of (The) Earth And Variants'. It's a 17-track release based on one short untranslatable medieval lament, which uses the word 'earth' 12 times in its four lines."

Who would you like to toast?
"Crow Versus Crow, Strategic Tape Reserve, Misophonia Records. My live performance collaborators, from Scott Pitkethly to the musicians who took part in my 'NATURE'S NICKELODEONS' touring live cinema show. Supernormal Festival, Hackoustic and Iklectik."

What's your best bit of career advice?
"Don't wait to be authorised to be a musician."

Your dream collaboration?
"The Leverhulme Centre for Anthropocene Biodiversity, creating live and living cinema in response to the work of their researchers and biologists on de-extinction."

And a New Year's resolution?
"To keep connecting with new people, more public spaces, to get away from my laptop and bedroom, and to keep on finding new ways of working."

ELLA KAY

Describe your work in one sentence
"Interpreting a perception of the world through experimental sound."

We should listen to...
"If you like city soundscapes, swirling textures and noisy thunderous gestures, I'd recommend my newest work, 'The Value Of Noise'."

Who would you like to toast?
"NOVARS Research Centre at The University of Manchester, Professor Ricardo Climent and Professor David Berezan for introducing me to electroacoustic music and the joys of sound. Also a massive thank you to my family, friends and my partner Eddie, for always nurturing my creativity and for their constant confidence in me!"

What's your best bit of career advice?
"Don't put too much pressure on yourself."

Your dream collaboration?
"My grandest idea would be to work with some of the founders of electroacoustic music, as I know I'd be able to learn so much. But more so, I'd love to work with my friends who also work in electroacoustic music and sound art."

And a New Year's resolution?
"Generally, I'd like to take more time for rest when needed, say no when I need to and meet new people. My music-oriented aspirations for the year involve exploring new areas of sound, more professional sound design work, and presenting electroacoustic music to more ears."

RANI JAMBAK

Describe your work in one sentence
"'Alam Takambang Jadi Guru' is one of my favourite pieces of Minangkabau Philosophy. It means 'Nature is our teacher' and has a very deep meaning for me and my work."

We should listen to...
"'Suara Minangkabau' on my YouTube channel. It's a fun way to learn about Minangkabau's culture."

Who would you like to toast?
"I am grateful to be surrounded by many beautiful friends that helped me grow and listen to my difficulties. I also want to thank my husband."

What's your best bit of career advice?
"It's not about you choosing music or music choosing you – it's about the universe choosing music for you."

Your dream collaboration?
"I always admire Björk's vision and exploration of her music, soul and environment."

And a New Year's resolution?
"I am expecting a baby next year. It's going to be a huge change for me and my music. I am also now working on my album. Hopefully I can adapt to the new stage of life smoothly and release my album in the middle of next year."

LIA MAZZARI

Describe your work in one sentence
"My creative practice exists in different contexts, spaces and forms – it's omnidisciplinary, situated, curatorial, often collaborative and engages diverse audiences through sonic encounters in unusual spaces."

We should listen to...
"'Decameron-19: 100 Dispatches From The Isolated City' was a trans-disciplinary project I started with artist Ben Parry during the first global lockdown, as a response to the socio-political condition brought on by the pandemic."

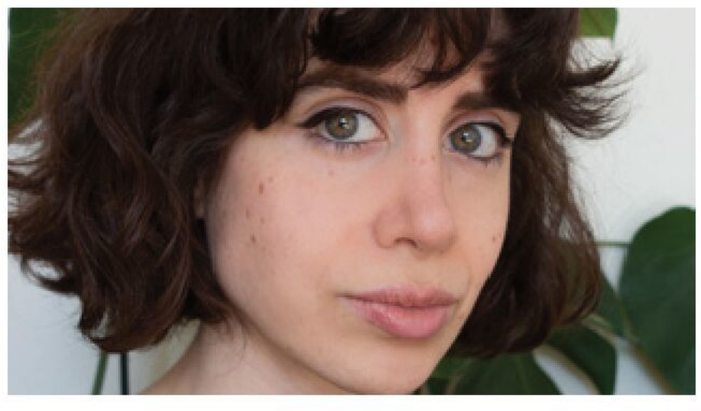
Who would you like to toast?
"Artists from Soundcamp, for sharing their knowledge about transmission ecologies with me. Artist Ella Finer for her constant support and motivation to keep my practice evolving. And Ben Parry for his guidance and for always putting the politics back into my work."

What's your best bit of career advice?
"One thing sound artist Maria Chavez told me about seven years ago, over a bowl of peas, is that your ideas need to live outside of your own head, even in the most ill-conceived manner."

Your dream collaboration?
"Maryanne Amacher. She was such a fascinating, multifaceted artist and composer, always looking to the future and grasping the unheard."

And a New Year's resolution?
"Play the cello much more often, and release my collection of whip cracking recordings that I've been working on for a few years."

FRKTL (SARAH BADR)



Describe your work in one sentence
"I work with procedural systems for simulation and spatialisation in sound and graphics, as well as real-time manipulation and improvisation, which allows me to explore world creation, complex natural phenomena, and the association between form and place in new digital spaces."

We should listen to...
"My short film 'Azimuth', which is my first complete work since setting out to learn 3D graphics programming. It incorporates immersive technologies in earnest."

Who would you like to toast?
"My family has been incredibly supportive. I am forever grateful for their continued inspiration, nurturing and encouragement over the years."

What's your best bit of career advice?
"What I've learned, in passing, is not to rely too much on any one particular thing."

Your dream collaboration?
"Felicity Mangan, Mabe Fratti, Björk, Abdullah Miniawy, Aho Ssan, Senyawa, KMRU, TIBSLC... I am deeply in awe of their music and creativity."

And a New Year's resolution?
"To be more disciplined with my time, and finish my next full-length album and follow-up short film."

LULA.XYZ

Describe your work in one sentence
"A quest for home, exploring energy, feelings and thoughts, rooted in play as a creative process."

We should listen to...
"'Dalston'. It's the only single officially released from my 2020 EP, 'From My Hands 2 UR Ears'. The project was recorded in one take using MiMU gloves – the wearable tech MIDI controller. It acted as a time capsule for my live performances."

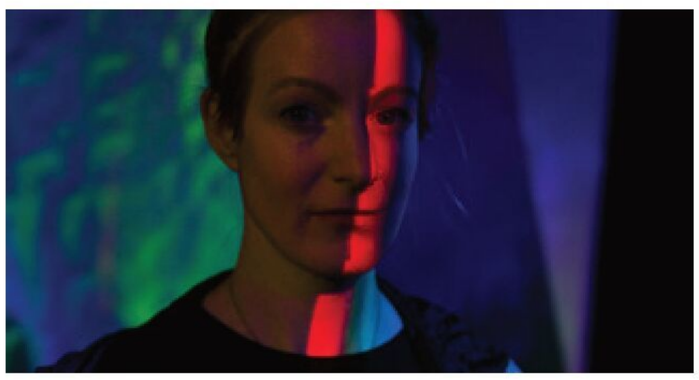
Who would you like to toast?
"Chris Sholar, Freda Knowles and Julia Cheng have been instrumental in helping me trust my voice. Ben Hirst and Amy Dickens were amazing and gave their time and energy at an instrumental time of my career. I will forever be grateful!"

What's your best bit of career advice?
"Your 'success' is not determined by your talent!"

Your dream collaboration?
"Björk. It's always been Björk."

And a New Year's resolution?
"Remember the universe is on your side, be clear and ask for what you want unapologetically. Also, New Year's resolutions start the day you start them. It's not set to the Gregorian calendar."

KELLY JAYNE JONES



Describe your work in one sentence
"Exploring animist ideas around the breath and spirit of mountains and rivers, and how we can reconnect with ourselves and our planet by means of ancient and future rituals."

We should listen to...
"I still love the piece I did for the Cafe Oto imprint Takuroku during the pandemic, 'The Reed Flute Is Fire'. It's inspired by the mystic Rumi and his story of the reed flute that made a crying sound since being cut from the reed bed."

Who would you like to toast?
"Many, many excellent and inspiring people and experiences over the years. Playing squats and DIY spaces across continents, creating installations and work with beautiful collaborator and friend Haris Epaminonda at Venice Biennale. It is hard to name just one person, those closest to me are incredibly supportive and amazing."

What's your best bit of career advice?
"I've not had any advice that I can remember. To be honest, I've mostly followed my intuition about what feels right."

Your dream collaboration?
"Probably Joan Jonas."

And a New Year's resolution?
"I'm excited to dive deep into researching and exploring ideas connected to this Oram Award!"

For more, visit oramawards.com

FLY ME TO THE MOOG

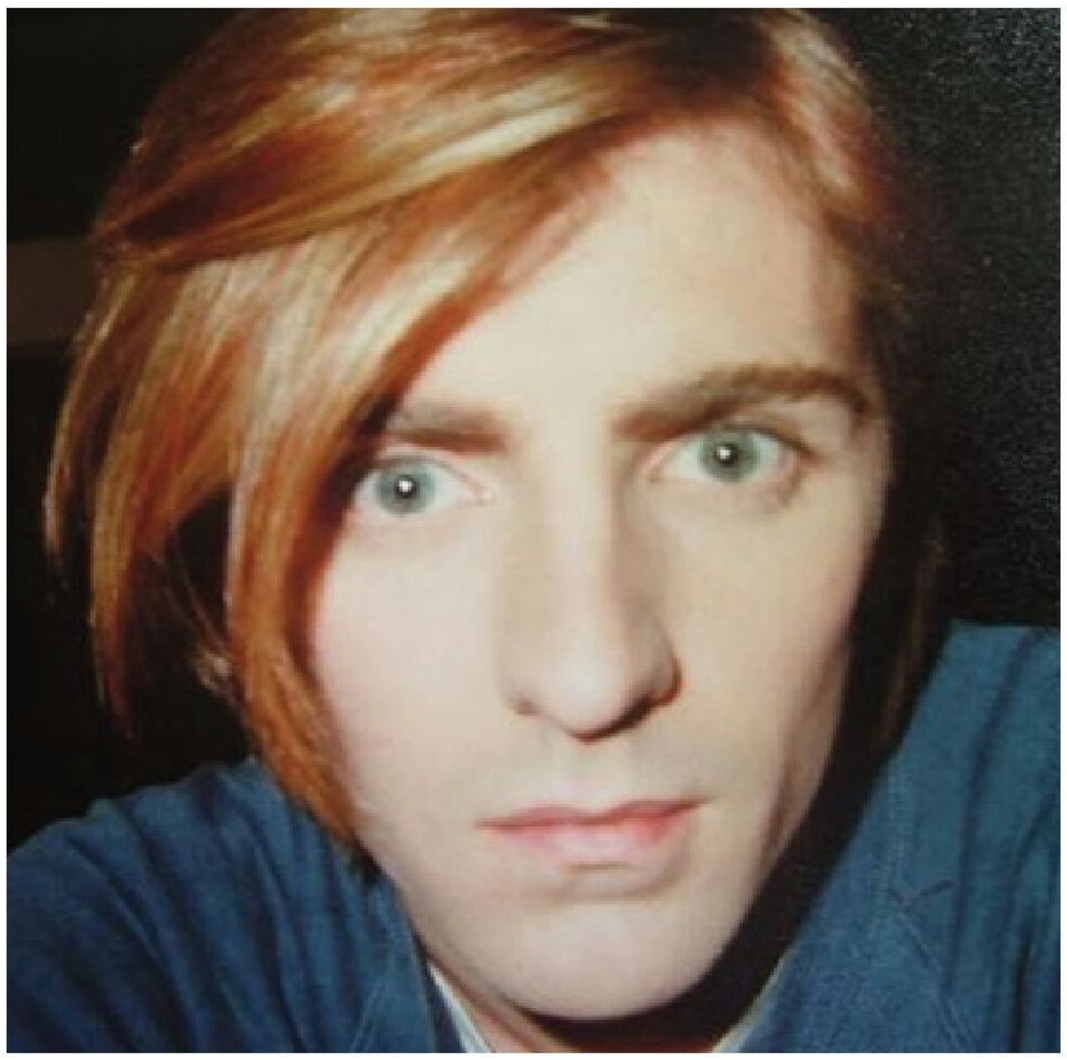
Welcome home, Minimoog

It's the kind of news that prompts calls for a bank holiday in the Electronic Sound office, as the Minimoog Model D, one of the most venerated synthesisers in history, is back in production once again. In case you need a recap, the Model D is the synth that saved Moog Music from certain liquidation, while simultaneously introducing a new generation of musicians to the notion of electronic instruments and creating Moog devotees across the musical stratosphere.

"Built to last a lifetime, each new Minimoog Model D delivers the revered quality, undefinable feel and authentic sound of a pristine vintage Moog," say Moog Music. How much? Who cares. **moogmusic.com**

ENIGMAS

Sweeping the forgotten corridors of sound, **Scott Blixen** sets his sights on **Bleep & Booster**



Bleep & Booster crafted electropop of wistful elegance and precision in the space created by Kraftwerk's inertia. In the liminal period of the early 1990s, however, they tragically vanished into a void.

Nurtured in Sheffield, arguably Britain's capital city of electronic music, Bleep & Booster had an impeccable pedigree. Stephen Singleton – the Bleep half of the duo – belonged to a select breed of artists from the city who transformed from post-punk refuseniks into proper pop stars. His group, Vice Versa, morphed into glitzy pop confection ABC and followed the trail into the charts already blazed by The Human League.

In 1984, Singleton left ABC and set up a studio with David Lewin, who became his Booster. While working as producers and remixers for hire, the pair recorded original material, taking their name from a strip cartoon featured on 'Blue Peter'. For Singleton, it marked a return to the electronic seedbed that germinated Cabaret Voltaire and Clock DVA.

Released in 1990, their first 12-inch EP was adorned with Polaroid images of Tokyo at night. If 'Electro City' was a love letter to a distant city of dreams, it could equally have been addressed to the group's Sheffield home. The follow-up, 1991's 'Technotropolis', cemented Bleep & Booster as musical emissaries from a metropolitan utopia.

While the first two records were released on the group's own Tove label, their sole album, 'The World Of Bleep & Booster', came out on London Records in 1994. If their music had struggled to make waves before, it was heartbreaking that a major label push did little to connect them with a wider audience. On the album, 'Electro City' is transformed into a multifaceted masterwork of wonder and grace, 'Boosterdrome' is a stately ode to a future paradise lost, while 'Amber To Atoms' rewinds to the world of Vangelis' proto-ambient 'L'Apocalypse Des Animaux' – a very lovely place to be.

Cultural commentators and historians acknowledge the early 1990s as a period when the old order faded and a new one had yet to form. Bleep & Booster lifted the torch that Kraftwerk had clumsily dropped, as Düsseldorf's classic quartet disintegrated into lethargy. With hindsight, you might say B&B mark a staging post between 'Neon Lights' and 2814's 'Birth Of A New Day'. Had 'The World Of Bleep & Booster' been released in another time, it's hard not to think that it would have attained legendary status.

PULSE

KIMBER

York dreampoppers primed for a break

WHO?

Kimber is Mikey Wilson and Josh Heffernan, a York-based duo who, after a decade working together on various projects, are now making music on their own terms. The result has been a series of stunning singles inspired by electropop, post-punk and new wave.

WHY KIMBER?

Their debut EP, 'Slow Moon, Long Night', is a collection of crystalline electronic indie steeped in catchy melodies and brooding atmospherics packed with intriguing contradictions. While the production is pristine, the music itself has a palpable roughness, and they call their ethos "performed not programmed", which explains the humanity in their machine-led sound. 'Think I Know The Answer', their debut single from 2020, combines the rhythmic pulse of New Order and Mount Kimbie's woozy production style with the melodic moodiness of Beach House. 'A Melancholy Spring', on the other hand, dives further into the darker end of early 1980s electropop. Though it's taken time for this duo to come out of the woods, each new offering has shown added nuance to their sound.

TELL US MORE...

Building the Kimber vision hasn't been easy. Though they have a genuine obsession with collecting studio gear and opening up to new production methods, tools had to be gathered over time without the backing of a major label. But Wilson and Heffernan gradually saved money from their day jobs, and with each new piece of kit came fresh opportunities to learn. Their first drum machine purchase, a Korg Volca Beats, can be heard on the main loop of 'House In The Sky', a standout track from the EP which signals the opening experiments from an electropop act full of potential. Expect to hear more from these two.

JAMES THORNHILL

'Slow Moon, Long Night' is out now on Safe Suburban Home

LEARNING CURVE

Blazing a trail with early releases from Polypores, The Home Current, Listening Center, The Detox Twins and Dream Division, **Polytechnic Youth** is the gold standard of DIY imprints. But all good things must come to an end. With a final release scheduled for this month, we catch up with the label's big cheese, **Dom Martin**, for one last hurrah... or is it?

INTERVIEW: NEIL MASON

It was a cutting lathe that gave birth to Polytechnic Youth back in 2014, right?

"That's right. A friend decided on a career change and ploughed all his savings into buying a cutting lathe and a massive stash of blank discs in varying sizes. The first release, 'Electronic Music' by Volume Groop, the pseudonym of an old friend, was just a fun project – hence the pitiful pressing of 20."

PY shimmers with the spirit of 1978-82, seven-inch singles, early Mute, Sheffield. Stupid question, but what's the appeal?

"We all have an era when you're growing up and taking music seriously, where you're like a sponge to anything and everything. It was just the era for me. It was a massively creative time and obviously appearing at the back end of punk where people realised anyone could form a band and release their own seven-inch. Then with the advent of bedroom-recorded, primitive, experimental electronic music married into that, it was just wonderful. I wouldn't say that PY had a specific remit for that era, but it was massively inspired by it – and I don't really see that in many current labels."

Why are you such a fan of the seven-inch single?

"It was always my favourite format. I'd devour every morsel of info on my mum's 45s as a kid, and there's a thrill of a perfect three-minute blast of pure joy that you don't get with an album. Also, the seven-inches I bought growing up seemed to come out with loads of inserts and handmade sleeves, which was just unbeatable!"

You're quoted as releasing something like 500 records in the last 25-odd years. That's no mean feat...

"Yes indeed, although make that around 520 in 26 years now! When you see it written down like that I guess it is quite an achievement."

As well as PY, your previous labels – Earworm and The Great Pop Supplement – have released work by some truly show-stopping names...

"There have been some absolutely incredible bands in there, musical heroes like Spacemen 3... just the other day I found a stash of beautiful handwritten letters from people like John Balance, Hans-Joachim Roedelius, lots from Klaus Dinger and a sadly worn-away fax from a true great in my eyes, Florian Fricke. That's a mini 25-year history in a box right there."

You seem good at recognising when a label has run its course. What was it about Earworm and The GPS that made you call time on them?

"I should say that in those two cases there was an organisation that played a massive hand in their closures – the bitterness still rages! I do sometimes feel the need to move on, freshen stuff up for myself, maybe it's even a reflection of what I'm listening to at any given time."

You've been making some noises about Polytechnic Youth lately. Is it really curtains?

"Well, there are no new releases planned, but the demise of Earworm and The GPS has taught me not to close the door completely on PY, so who knows?"

What makes you think it's the end of the road?

"It was the massive rise in cost of vinyl production, allied to the loss of a large chunk of business on the continent after Brexit. Also, the same bands seem to be rotating around four or five labels – all great artists and labels, but I felt there was a little stagnation creeping in."

So what is the last scheduled release on PY?

"The last one is a 10-inch with Marc Schaffer's Shibuya Station, which is due this month."

Looking back, are there any releases you're especially proud of?

"I've really loved them all, so it's hard to pick out favourites, but honourable mentions go to Australian Testing Labs' 'Music For Aircooled Motoring' album, everything by Polypores, Tomorrow Syndicate, Gabe Knox, and everything Alan Outram would concoct under various guises. It was lovely to hook up with Mark Dawson – a fella who I knew a little in Southfields as a kid. When he'd come in with new music from Detox Twins and Vorderhaus that was a thrill."

You've already shifted attention to a new label, Feral Child. What's the story there?

"I'm super-excited about what the future holds for Feral Child. It's an 'anything goes' coming together of all my previous labels, which massively appeals just now. So lots of kraut and kosmische stuff, psych, some folk, and in a tip of the hat to Swansea's Fierce Recordings, there'll be bootleggy, on-the-edge seven-inchesin among new releases, with several very Electronic Sound-friendly artists… although it'll all be released in smaller quantities that don't require an EU pressing plant."

For more about Feral Child, see facebook.com/fcrecordings. Email thegreatpopsupplement@hotmail.com to join the label's mailing list

PULSE

MISS GRIT

Sensory cyborgian electropop from NY

WHO?

Margaret Sohn is a Korean-American musician trading under the moniker, Miss Grit. Originally from Michigan, Sohn left home to study on the Music Technology course at NYU, and since graduating she's churned out a number of well-received EPs. But with news of a debut album coming out early next year on Mute Records, the label have treated us to two singles from the record, both of which show a genuine star-in-waiting.

WHY MISS GRIT?

Like some of Mute's most revered releases, Sohn's intelligent brand of pop comes laced with the threat of something darker lurking behind the accessible chord structures. 'Follow The Cyborg', the lead single and title track from the upcoming album, is a glitchy electropop anthem full of incisive lyrics referencing the mechanical nature of modern pop culture and warning, "I was born to pose / Oh, I was born with clothes". One of Sohn's main inspirations is American artist St Vincent, which makes total sense when you press play on 'Like You', the second single released ahead of the full album. This track draws you in with catchy vocal hooks, before grabbing you by the scruff of the neck with ferociously muscular guitar riffs.

TELL US MORE...

'A quick scour of Sohn's album artwork and music videos reveals an artist firmly engaged with the spectre of artificial intelligence. She even shaved her eyebrows off for the 'Follow The Cyborg' video, which is usually a good measure of commitment. Yet while there's a sense of imminent sci-fi dystopia to the sonic worlds she's creating (with the influence of films like 'Ex Machina' writ large), Sohn's future is very bright. Resistance, you might have guessed, is futile.

JEREMY ALLEN

'Follow The Cyborg' and 'Like You' are out now on Mute. Miss Grit's album follows early next year

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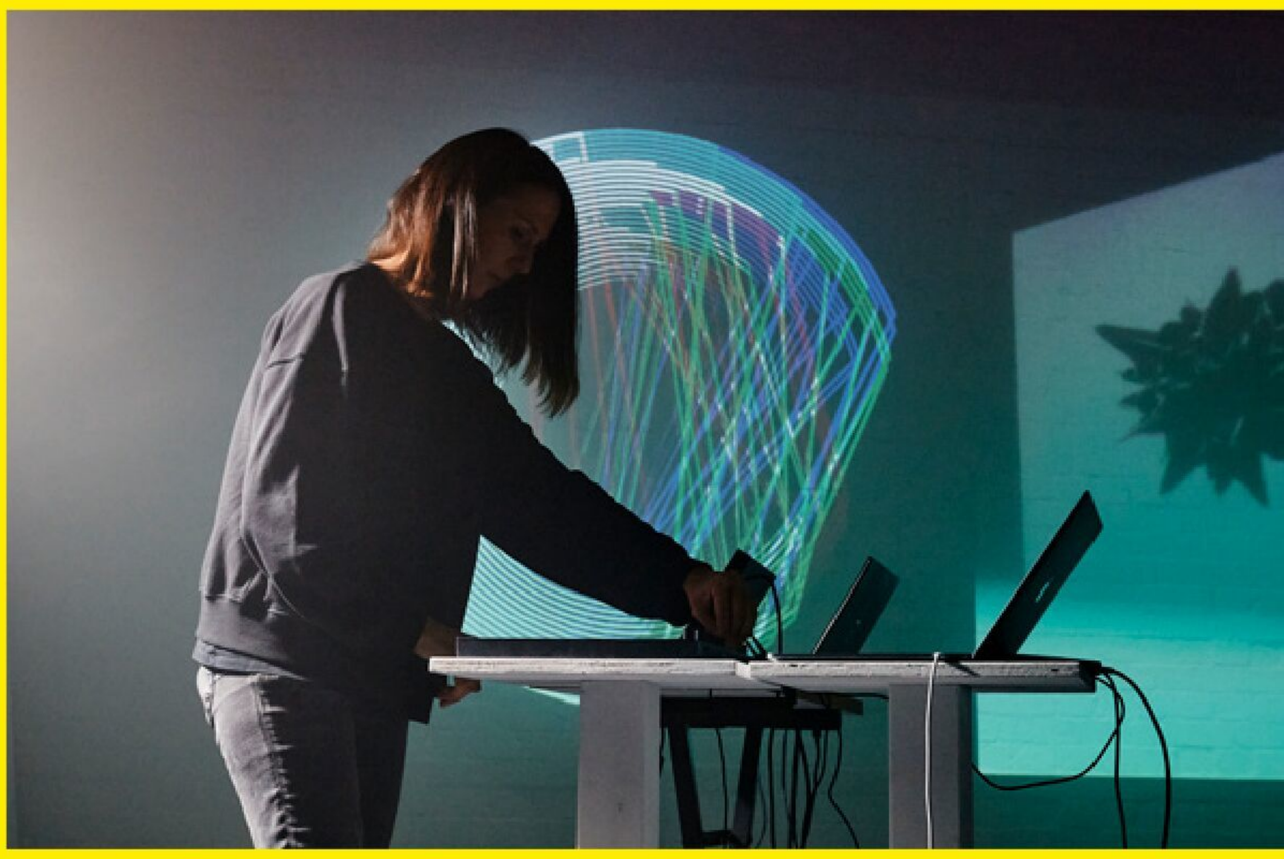


WATCH NOW

ELECTRONICSOUND.CO.UK/SESSIONS

MAN OF THE FUTURE

Jean-Michel Jarre is forever looking to move inexorably forward. His latest album, 'Oxymore', is a musique concrète record created with 21st century technology, pushing 3D binaural sound to incredible new levels and keeping the French maestro several steps ahead of the curve. Headphones on...

WORDS: JEREMY ALLEN
PICTURES: FRANÇOIS ROUSSEAU

T

here are early adopters… and then there's Jean-Michel Jarre. The French electronic pioneer has enjoyed an unparalleled career spanning nearly half a century, always at the cutting edge of technology and with each release anticipating in some way what was to come – from groundbreaking synthesisers and laser harps to leaps forward in studio production and the consumption of the music itself.

And so it is that, on a sunny late autumn afternoon in north London, a small group of music journalists and up-and-coming composers have been invited to listen to 'Oxymore', Jarre's 22nd studio album, at the premises of L-Acoustics, the French manufacturer of amplifiers and loudspeakers. While the album can obviously be listened to on a simple hi-fi system or through headphones, the sheer fantasia of the immersive event we're treated to is really quite something.

Artists as diverse as Brian Eno, Tears For Fears, Lady Gaga and Snarky Puppy have recently embraced Dolby Atmos, the universal format for multichannel, home cinema and spatial audio launched by Dolby Laboratories a decade ago. Jarre is one step ahead of the game as usual, though, with his new album available as both a Dolby Atmos *and* a binaural mix. Binaural sound, an immersive audio headphone experience, might give you some idea of the revolution that beckons, but nothing prepares you for the 360-degree thrill of 'Oxymore', with spatial sound penetrating your receptors in unison.

White speakers have been assembled in a circle around the audience at the playback, positioned like the hours of a clock face. You can hear water gently trickling down the walls on one side of the room as the opening track of the album, 'Agora', begins to play, contrasting with the crackling of a fire on the other side. Jungle noises pop out of 'Crystal Garden', whorls of mechanical clicks and whirrs underpin 'Brutalism', and a bird flaps ominously by on 'Animal Genesis'. It's not quite the Lumière brothers projecting moving images to dumbfounded spectators in fin-de-siècle Paris, but it's up there.

Jarre wanders about the room unobtrusively as the album plays, tapping the brickwork and taking in how the different elements reverberate off the walls and the ceiling.

"The goal of all of this is actually to share with people the feeling of being inside the music," he says, speaking to the audience afterwards.

The transition from stereo to spatial could prove to be as seismic as the switch from mono to stereo was in the late 1960s. There have been false dawns before, of course, and this may be another. But Jarre believes our tilt towards the virtual world in order to communicate with each other during the pandemic has quickened our collective acceptance of concepts such as the metaverse. And if we're opening up to the idea of virtual reality, it stands to reason that sound enhancement will soon follow.

JEAN-MICHEL JARRE

J

ean-Michel Jarre is occupied with his phone when I hook up with him at the Sony Music offices the following day. Having been in a meeting for several hours, he's digesting his missed messages as he paces up and down. You'd imagine a man like Jarre would have been wired into the matrix already, such is his oneness with technology, but he appears to still need to answer texts like the rest of us. He asks someone to fetch him an espresso and promises to give me his full attention when he's finished with his messages.

Jarre is true to his word and, with the interview underway, he is a thoughtful and attentive subject. Expressions such as "That's a good question" and "It's true what you say" pepper his conversation. A recent recipient of the Légion d'Honneur in France, he's very friendly and one of his interview tactics seems to be to make you think you've thought of everything. As well as being effortlessly charming, he looks as freakishly youthful as ever. Few 74-year-olds could carry off wearing a snakeskin jacket and sunglasses indoors, but Jarre's certainly one of them.

The French synthesist might be here to promote his new album, but he's an evangelist for something more radical in the long term – and his proselytising is working.

"I'm absolutely convinced that immersive sound is the next revolution, just like the emergence of synthesisers before it," he announces.

Ahead of getting into the nitty-gritty of 'Oxymore', I wonder why Jarre thinks spatial sound is the next frontier when other formats have failed to live up to initial expectations. He was similarly enthusiastic about Dolby 5.1 surround sound when he released his 'AERO' album in 2004. Aside from its adoption in cinemas, it fell significantly short of becoming the next big thing.

"That's a very interesting question," he says, pondering for a moment. "Because at the beginning, 5.1 was really amazing."

He talks about how he jumped on the technology – as did artists like Pink Floyd – but concedes that what they did then might seem somewhat gimmicky compared with the latest sonic possibilities.

"Firstly, there is a platform for this, which there wasn't with 5.1," he continues. "Sure, 5.1 was taken up in the movie theatres, but most people didn't have the equipment, so there was no market for it. You already have the tools for binaural right now, though, because it can be used with your smartphone and a set of standard headphones. You can have a totally immersive experience surrounded by music sitting on the Tube. We also didn't have the polyphony with 5.1 that we do with this."

Jarre goes on to speak about the Doppler effect, where a frequency changes as the source alters position relative to the listener. With the new spatial sound system, this simulation of details moving around you – running water, a flapping bird, or whatever – becomes seamless.

"Suddenly, the fact that you don't have to deal with stereo anymore means I could put this here… and then I could move it there," says Jarre, gesturing with his hand. "And it's not just for fun, because it actually creates emotions. This is the reason I think it's going to change how music is produced in the future. Especially electronic music."

‘0

xymore’ is a record that looks back and yet is rarely nostalgic. It relates to a series of formative events in Jarre’s life, all of them interconnected by threads of time.

“I remember Fellini told me one day, ‘Whatever you do, you always make the same film or the same music’,” says Jarre, speaking about Federico Fellini, the great Italian auteur and one of his heroes. “It’s the inclination of who you are and your own obsessions.”

Jarre eschews melody for texture on ‘Oxymore’, a kind of scorched-earth policy that pays off handsomely. The album marks a return to where everything started for him – at the Groupe de Recherches Musicales (GRM), the electroacoustic music laboratory in Paris where he studied under the tutelage of musique concrète legend Pierre Schaeffer in the late 1960s. There are even echoes of his 1971 debut release, a seven-inch bringing together ‘La Cage’ and ‘Erosmachine’, two tracks he had recorded at the GRM a couple of years earlier.

“The origin of electronic music is based on textures,” says Jarre. “This whole project is a tribute to the electroacoustic pioneers and especially to the French way of approaching this music. These guys were obsessed with texture and how sound could evolve with the Doppler effect of something like a car or a train passing by. So I wanted to go back to this approach, to this method, and at the same time explore what immersive sounds enable you to do, because every element of the album has been given the space in which it can be fully expressed and heard.”

By imposing quite strict ways of working on himself, Jarre has opened up different sonic worlds to play around in and crafted one of his most relevant albums since the 1980s. In fact, it’s arguably one of his best overall. As ever, he has his eyes on the prize – and that shiny and often elusive object is almost always the future.

“Working on the evolution of textures is why ‘Oxymore’ is a very special album for me in my career,” he asserts. “Because I do think I’ve made a link between the origin of electroacoustic music – because I studied it, this was also my origin – and 21st century technology.”

Perhaps surprisingly, one album that doesn’t correlate with ‘Oxymore’ is ‘Oxygène’, Jarre’s stunning breakthrough release. He recorded the 1976 classic in his kitchen studio with an ARP 2600, an EMS VCS 3, a Mellotron and a 4-track Revox, as well as a Korg Mini-Pops 7 drum machine for those unmistakable bossa nova riddims, his initial concept arising from a desire to tread a line between avant-garde music and pop. It proved to be an astute hunch. ‘Oxygène’ has sold in excess of 18 million copies worldwide.

“I never even thought about ‘Oxygène’ until the late stage of this album,” he says. “It really hadn’t occurred to me. Of course, I realised afterwards, because some people said, ‘Yes, it’s like *more* oxygen…’.”

The title ‘Oxymore’ comes from the word “oxymoron”, which the Oxford English Dictionary defines as “a figure of speech in which apparently contradictory terms appear in conjunction”. This was an idea at the very heart of the Groupe de Recherches Musicales and the modus operandi of Pierre Schaeffer. So what was Schaeffer like?

“You know, he was quite a strange person and a real genius too,” replies Jarre, with deep admiration. “He saw everything. He saw the music of the future, he saw the internet, he saw the future of communications, and he wrote lots of very complex but very clever books about the future of broadcasting, which you should read if you have the courage.”

The GRM wasn’t the happiest of places for Jarre, however. He found the focus too dry, too earnest, too obviously academic. It was sometimes almost prescriptively anti-emotional.

“I left the GRM because I didn’t like the arrogance of their intellectual approach to music, which totally ignored what was going on in pop culture,” reveals Jarre. “Bands like Pink Floyd and Soft Machine were also using textures and experimenting in ways that were close to what was happening at the GRM, but the GRM people didn’t want to know about them. They thought they were the only ones in the world doing this.”

When Jarre told Schaeffer he wasn’t interested in staying in a laboratory for the rest of his life, the GRM head encouraged his protege to follow his instincts.

“Schaeffer said to me, ‘Yes, you shouldn’t waste your time here’,” he recalls. “He said, ‘Your destiny is out of this place, to experiment more with an audience in mind, and to follow your own way’.”

S

chaeffer's musique concrète comrade-in-arms was another Pierre, Pierre Henry, who helped him set up the French radio-aligned Groupe de Recherche de Musique Concrète (GRMC) in 1951. Before that, they had been involved in Schaeffer's radiophony-oriented Studio d'Essai, where they even worked with perfunctory turntables.

"That's why I call these guys the first DJs," notes Jarre. "A lot of people think electronic music is a recent thing, but this whole movement goes back a long way. What Schaeffer and Henry did in the 1940s and 1950s started everything off. The fact is they were the first to think of music not in terms related to solfeggio, but in terms of noise."

While Schaeffer continued in academia for many years, becoming an associate professor at the Conservatoire de Paris in the latter part of his career, Henry journeyed out into the wider world and turned his attention to composing. One or two of his pieces found a place in pop culture, but his success was somewhat limited.

"Not too many people really know about Pierre Henry… and I think that's unfair," says Jarre. "If he'd been American, he would probably be as well-known as John Cage, if not more so. The tragic aspect of Henry is he's mainly recognised for the one song, 'Psyché Rock', which was remixed by Fatboy Slim, but that was actually co-written by a famous soundtrack composer called Michel Colombier, who did a lot of the arrangements for Serge Gainsbourg."

Pierre Henry was one of the artists Jarre had intended to work with on the first of his collaborative 'Electronica' albums in 2015, but Henry's failing health prevented his participation. And although he sadly died two years later, he inadvertently provided the impetus for 'Oxymore' when he bequeathed Jarre a number of stems containing some of the concrète material he had amassed.

Henry receives a posthumous co-writer credit on most of the tracks on the album, despite only being involved in spirit. He can also be heard talking about the processes of his work on a couple of the pieces, including 'Agora'. His found sounds permeate the record and Jarre acknowledges that they were an impetus for the project, the subtitle of which is 'Homage To Pierre Henry'.

"At the end of the day, I used perhaps five per cent of the sounds here from Pierre Henry," he says. "So it was not that much, but he was very important as a source of inspiration."

Ultimately, the album is a tribute to both Pierres, the rocks upon which electronic music was built, using the most cutting-edge equipment available.

"That is another reason why it's called 'Oxymore'," affirms Jarre. "Because 'Oxymore' is the basis of electronic sound sampling. You take a sample of the rain and mix it with a clarinet. Or you take a sample of an engine and mix it with an electric guitar. When you do that, you create these monsters – morphed creatures and sonic androids."

Jarre employed a fascinating array of instruments to conjour up his "monsters". Alongside his trusty Mellotron, the sleeve notes of the album mention two brand-new synths, an Osmose from the French manufacturer Expressive E and a C15 from Nonlinear Labs in Germany, as well as a Blipbox, a Wuhan Wind Gong and a Cristal Baschet, which is a sculptural instrument that acts as a metallic resonator. He also made his own organic sounds from scratch.

"To simulate fire, for instance, I used some magnetic tape," he explains. "But I was touching and twisting and crunching it in front of a mic. I really explored lots of different techniques to produce these kinds of things."

As a result, 'Oxymore' is less a collection of compositions, more an artful collage of sound design.

"And sound design is one of the core elements of modern composition these days," asserts Jarre. "That's why I thought that linking my work with somebody like Pierre Henry, and showing how I was inspired by him, would be a nice move."

If that was the starting point, then the album was to become something else entirely once it got underway. The addition of disparate components makes it a musique concrète record with a distinctly 21st century sensibility. It's quite unlike anything else you'll have heard before.

"Essentially, what I've tried to do all along is keep this kind of organic, sensual, sexual aspect. So on 'Brutalism', we had direct contact with a maelstrom of noises – not just industrial noises but also an avalanche. So it's something that is very organic… but also dangerous."

Jean-Michel Jarre was one of the most recognisable faces on the planet during the 1970s and 1980s, playing parts of the world that other artists couldn't reach. In 1981, he became the first Western musician to perform in China after the Cultural Revolution, resulting in his hugely successful 'Les Concerts En Chine' double live album. He is reputed to have played to more people in one evening than any other artist, in front of three-and-a-half million Muscovites in 1997 (having previously achieved record-breaking crowds at city spectaculars in Paris and Houston).

Jarre's influence on electronic music has been profound and unquantifiable. His many accomplishments are known to people who profess to having no interest in music at all, whether electronic or otherwise. He remains a household name getting on for five decades after breaking down so many barriers with 'Oxygène' and its 1978 follow-up, the equally brilliant 'Équinoxe'. That's some feat for a pop icon who doesn't sing.

Looking further back at the influences and epiphanies that got Jarre to where he was going is a boulevard less travelled. His experiences as a younger man have undoubtedly informed his latest release, though. With 'Oxymore', the present is the past and vice versa.

Jean-Michel André Jarre was born in the 4th arrondissement of Lyon in 1948. His mother, Francette Pejot, had been a notable member of the French Resistance during the Second World War. Arrested by the Nazis in June 1944, she survived almost a year in a concentration camp and passed away in 2010 at the grand age of 96. His father was the composer Maurice Jarre, who was responsible for the film scores to 'Doctor Zhivago', 'Lawrence Of Arabia', 'Jesus Of Nazareth' and 'Fatal Attraction', among countless others.

Dubbed the "Capital of the Resistance" by Charles de Gaulle, Lyon now has a street named after his mother, Passage France Pejot, in honour of her remarkable bravery.

"It is maybe a bit strange that, between my mum, my dad and myself, the one who gets the recognition of the street name is my mum," says Jarre, beaming with pride. "As well as being a major figure in the French Resistance, she also had a strong influence on me in the way that she considered life. She was an extraordinary person."

Jarre is more ambivalent when speaking about his father, who left for Hollywood when his son was just five years old, separating from Francette in the process. Unsurprisingly, the young Jarre grew up in a house filled with music and visited by a procession of performers and composers, many of them connected to his father. John Cage dropped by while Francette was pregnant, put his hand on her bump and declared, "There is a musician in there!".

Cage was correct, although he was hardly hedging his bets. Jarre Senior knew the American composer through one of his other great modernist friends, Pierre Boulez, who was as fierce and forthright in person as his public image suggested.

"My father and Boulez were very close," says Jarre. "They had both been musicians at the Compagnie Renaud-Barrault, the famous Paris theatre troupe, after the war. Boulez was at the piano and my father was a percussionist. Before my father left my mum and me – so this must have been when I was about three or four years old – I have this memory of him and Boulez painting the kitchen in the small apartment where we lived, in the suburbs in the south of France. And Boulez said, 'Apart from Bach and myself, everyone else is shit'. So, yes, he was a little arrogant perhaps."

Painting of another kind was actually Jarre's first love. He initially struggled to decide between trying to make a career in music or art, but he feels he managed to combine the two in the end, creating textural soundscapes in the image of abstract artists like Pierre Soulages, who used mainly black paint applied in thick layers, a technique that he called "Outrenoir" ("Beyond Black"). Soulages died just a few weeks ago aged 102, having worked right up until the end of his life.

"He had these huge, huge canvases," notes Jarre. "He is a model for all of us, because I consider what he did in these past 15 years to probably be his best work."

n 1957, on his ninth birthday, Jarre's mother took him to Le Chat Qui Pêche in Paris, an influential jazz club run by Mimi Ricard, another celebrated French Resistance fighter. Chet Baker, the American trumpeter, was performing that night.

"There is a direct link between this story and 'Oxymore'," says Jarre. "I believe this was my first physical experience of music, of the effect of sound on my body. For my birthday, Chet Baker sat me on an upright piano and played his trumpet for me, the instrument being like this…"

He pauses and indicates the bell of the trumpet up close to his thorax.

"Each time I remember this moment, I still think of the effect of the air from the instrument on my chest – the physiological aspect and the effect upon my body. I think it's something that has probably been quite, quite important in my relationship with sound."

With his father settled in America, where he remained for the rest of his life, Jarre's paternal grandfather had stepped into the breach. The young boy would watch transfixed while André Jarre made all manner of amazing devices and machines in his workshop.

"He was an interesting character," notes Jarre. "He was an engineer and an inventor. A musician too. He made one of the first mixing desks, which was used by a radio station in Lyon before the war. He also created an ancestor of the iPod, an early portable turntable called the Teppaz.

"For my 11th birthday, my grandfather gave me a second-hand tape recorder. It was German, a Grundig, and I was so impressed with this machine. I became totally obsessed with recording everything that I could. My grandmother said to me, 'Wow, why are you spending all of your days with this thing?'. I would go out and record the noises of the street, the conversations I heard, whatever was happening around me. And then one day, I played the tape backwards… and I suddenly thought that aliens were talking to me. I had discovered sound processing by accident."

Jarre made use of the tape recorder in the two groups he joined during his teens, Mystère IV and The Dustbins. He played guitar in both outfits.

"I was processing the guitars, the organs, and everything else into this machine," he explains. "So that first gave me the concept of what would become my job. I suppose this might seem like a cliche, but life is all made out of luck and chance and coincidences. By luck, by chance, my grandfather gave me this tape recorder… and it changed my life."

At the time that Jarre was recording people on the street, France was involved in the Algerian War of Independence. I wonder if any of this activity had some bearing on his 1988 album, 'Revolutions'.

"Yes, I think perhaps it did, although I'd say my mum probably influenced me much more," he reasons. "Because she was obviously connected with the idea of resistance, which is itself associated with the French notion of revolution. Revolution seems to be always happening somewhere. And don't forget that people in France are known across the world for wanting to block the country every two weeks on the roads or at the ports or whatever."

Another big moment in Jarre's musical education was seeing The Beatles perform at L'Olympia in Paris in 1964. It was during the Fab Four's run of 18 dates in the French capital at the start of the year. The experience left the 15-year-old speechless, but he also had an important epiphany. Rock 'n' roll, he decided, was for "les Anglo-Saxons". He needed to try to find a different path – a path that would lead him to the GRM a few years later.

J

arre's first synthesiser was an EMS VCS 3. As the 1960s drew to a close, he sold his guitar and amp – "A statement!" – and went to London, to Putney, in order to purchase one of the famous early synths directly from Peter Zinovieff himself. He remembers the scene well.

"It was a small house and such a crazy moment," he says with a laugh. "It was this very hippy atmosphere. Peter and his wife were in the middle of the living room, with VCS 3s and lots of electronic parts lying about, and then there were two boys who were playing with darts around the house. These were real metal darts. It was fucking dangerous! And nobody cared because it was all, you know, peace and love."

The VCS 3 played a leading role in Jarre's contribution to 'AOR', a ballet score which he and fellow GRM student Igor Wakhévitch were invited to write for the Opéra de Paris in 1971. They were among the youngest artists to ever compose for the Opéra and 'AOR' was the first electronic piece to be performed at the Palais Garnier. Jarre spent much of his time waiting in the wings, however, expecting to be arrested at any moment because of a mix-up about whether or not he should be doing national service.

The same year as 'AOR', Jarre happened across a radical theatre production in Paris by the American director Robert Wilson. 'Deafman Glance', known as 'Le Regard Du Sourd' in French, was an eight-hour silent epic written as a tribute to Raymond Andrews, a deaf-mute boy Wilson had adopted as his son. Unfortunately, we have to rely on the testimony of those who saw it to explain what this avant-garde spectacle was all about.

"I went there by chance," says Jarre. "It's a pity it wasn't filmed because it was a masterpiece. For me, it was something absolutely new. There was no dialogue and it was only later on that I realised Bob Wilson was autistic. The whole concept was about sound, but like a silent movie. It was something very difficult to define because it was like a moving painting, with this extraordinary control of the stage lighting. It has been a major influence on me for stage design."

But it wasn't just the lighting of 'Deafman Glance' that had a profound effect on Jarre. He was also impressed by the fact that Wilson was able to communicate complex ideas without words.

"I said, 'This is what I want to do'," he continues. "I wanted to use instrumental music to try to create a relationship with the audience that went beyond words. I became convinced I could do that with live performances as well, with lights and theatrical techniques, then later on with videos and lasers."

Following on from 'AOR', Jarre composed music for a range of theatre shows, television programmes and advertising jingles, as well as the soundtrack to a 1973 movie called 'Les Granges Brûlées' ('The Burned Barns'). He also worked as a lyricist, which was somewhat ironic given how the silence of 'Deafman Glance' had inspired him. After helping to revive the career of French chansonnier Christophe, he was hired to write for Swiss singer Patrick Juvet, with Juvet's record label paying for the best session musicians money could buy.

"That gave me lots of experience in terms of production in studios," says Jarre.

Another of his compositions was 'Que Vas-Tu Faire?', which he gifted to Françoise Hardy. Serge Gainsbourg, yé-yé's own tour de force, responded by sending him a bottle of champagne with a note saying, "Welcome to the club".

Jarre had other ideas, however. Around the time he penned 'Que Vas-Tu Faire?', he used some of his songwriting royalties to buy an ARP 2600. The synth proved to be one of the catalysts for 'Oxygène', taking a lead role on the album and becoming his trademark sound. He acknowledges that he was late in embracing the Moog – uncharacteristically so – partly because the Minimoog was so expensive in Europe when it first arrived on the market.

"I was definitely an ARP guy at the beginning of my career," admits Jarre. "There's no question that the ARP 2600 made a massive contribution to my work in those early days. The Moog came later for me, but the first modular was fantastic and I really liked the Memorymoog too. They have this very spongy sound, whereas I think the ARP is much more precise and much more edgy in terms of attack. But they do complement each other. One instrument I find very interesting at the moment is the Animoog on the iPad. I think that's great."

Jarre also singles out the Yamaha CS-60, which he used on 'Équinoxe', and the Elka Synthex, which he used on 'Rendez-Vous', as important pieces of machinery for him over the years. Right now, though, he's all about Expressive E's Osmose. If I'd let him, I suspect he would have spent half the interview raving about the synth's sensitivity and intuitiveness.

The partnership between sound and vision has been a defining feature of Jean-Michel Jarre's live performances since the late 1970s. And while Robert Wilson provided his initial inspiration, his visuals have also been heavily influenced by the work of Iannis Xenakis, who was one of his lecturers at the Groupe de Recherches Musicales.

Xenakis was among the most stubbornly academic GRM thinkers when it came to music, but the Greek composer's audio-visual pieces had a lasting impact on Jarre. Particularly his astounding 'Polytope' installations, which featured complex light shows in stunning locations around the world and took place between 1967 and 1984.

"It's funny that you mention him," says Jarre. "I met with the Xenakis family, who were celebrating the 100th anniversary of his birth this year, and they recreated one of his 'Polytope' pieces. Xenakis was making really brutal music and mixing it with great visuals, even back in the 1950s. He did one of the first light shows with lots of lasers, perhaps the very first, and his pieces were always fantastic. Some people don't know about him, but he is an important figure for electronic musicians. He was another textures guy."

The grand-scale outdoor performances often associated with Jarre seem to be at odds with where he's at now, but his live shows have always been more than just spectacles. As the interview draws to a close, I put it to Jarre that they have sometimes been bellwethers of global events. I mention how his 1980s and 1990s extravaganzas in China and Russia reflected the way those two countries were opening up at that point and how his streamed 'Welcome To The Other Side' concert from a virtual Notre-Dame on New Year's Eve in 2020 was the perfect tonic for a world in lockdown. So where next?

"The hypertrophied or hyperrealist rock 'n' roll gigs… we're not there anymore," he answers. "We are much more conscious of energy problems at the moment and the idea of 'less is more' is something that has become important for us all in our day-to-day lives. With music, as with everything, technology enables us to think differently and it can help us solve lots of the issues we have with the environment. I'm convinced that the only way for us to survive is to establish a harmony between technology and ecology."

All of which makes absolute sense, especially coming from this man of the future, a musician who is forever looking to move inexorably forward, constantly searching for fresh ways to improve or advance what he does.

As for 'Oxymore', there is indeed more to come. Brian Eno and Martin Gore are among the big names who are reimagining tracks from the album for a new collection due to be released in 2023. Typically of Jarre, a number of emerging artists he's keen to give exposure to have also been invited to contribute to the project.

The future's so bright, he's gotta wear shades.

'Oxymore' is out now on Sony

ALBUMS OF THE YEAR

After another tumultuous year and a cavalcade of great music, choosing our 50 favourite albums of 2022 hasn't been easy. And for the first time ever, we have a joint Number One. We couldn't separate Telefís' standouts 'a Dó' and 'a hAon', so it felt only right to give the accolade to both. Mind you, every single record here is a corker – expect artists new and old, a sprinkling of future classics and a few surprises

1

Telefís
a Dó
DIMPLE DISCS

"At their heart, Telefís are bold and daft. What a tease to place the haunting 'We See Showbands', a close-mic visionary interlude, next to the Numan-esque synths of 'The Carthaginians', complete with showy backing vocals. To produce these textural variations with such ease is testament to a partnership that will be sorely missed." **FR**

Telefís
a hAon
DIMPLE DISCS

"Ultimately, 'a hAon' is the perfect marriage of Cathal Coughlan's evocative lyricism and caustic humour, with Jacknife Lee's extraordinary economy and subtle electronic phrasing. But the music does so much more than simply provide a backdrop to Coughlan's outpourings, weaving inextricably with his voice to produce a whole that dazzles." **AT**

2

Working Men's Club
Fear Fear
HEAVENLY RECORDINGS

"Working Men's Club have done everything by the book – riding a raft of praise with a record that builds and burgeons without ever losing the essential essence of… well, whatever it was that made them great in the first place." **BF**

3

Loraine James
Building Something Beautiful For Me
PHANTOM LIMB

"The power of the finished article is a blend of simplicity and complexity – for instance, in the way that programmed machines and the manipulated, wonky sound of a live drummer interact." **BW**

4

Plaid
Feorm Falorx
WARP

"Handley and Turner's musical futurism is one with warmth, humanity and a palpable depth of feeling. Eleven albums into their career, Plaid are still making vital records, and 'Feorm Falorx' is an excellent reminder of their craft." **BM**

5

Warrington-Runcorn New Town Development Plan
Districts, Roads, Open Space
CASTLES IN SPACE

"This is Gordon Chapman-Fox's third album as Warrington-Runcorn New Town Development Plan, and his unwavering obsession with the minutiae of 1970s urban regeneration continues to reap splendid rewards… An album of delightfully melancholic nostalgia for thwarted suburban dreams." **BF**

6

Elaine Howley
The Distance Between Heart And Mouth
TOUCH SENSITIVE

"An experimental amalgam of Howley's favourite sounds and textures, painstakingly arranged into nine detailed and hugely captivating vignettes. It's a difficult record to pigeonhole, but that's definitely no bad thing – you can't help but fall for its eclectic, strangely transcendental charms." **VI**

7

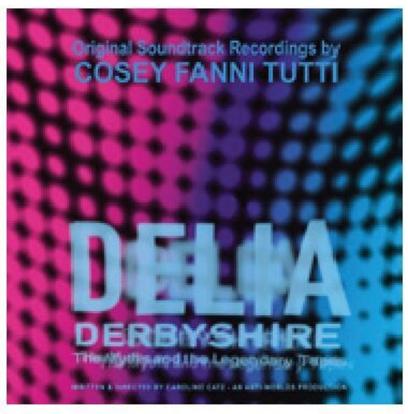
Gwenno
Tresor
HEAVENLY RECORDINGS

"Gwenno is not your usual revolutionary… she has quietly inspired a whole movement of people keen to restore the Cornish language to former glories. There's clearly some steeliness beneath this ethereal facade. But what a facade." **AT**

8

Acid Klaus
Step On My Travelator: The Imagined Career Trajectory Of Superstar DJ & Dance Pop Producer, Melvin Harris
ZEN FC

"We're treated to heaps of wry electronic pop brilliance. Eccentric and ingenious, certainly, but always accessible and welcoming, this is pure synthpop gold for the 21st century." **BW**



9

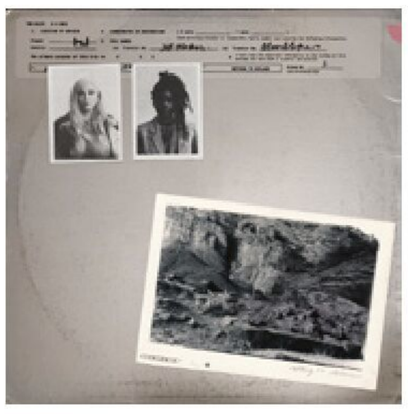
Cosey Fanni Tutti
Delia Derbyshire: The Myths And The Legendary Tapes
CONSPIRACY INTERNATIONAL

"All in all, this is a respectful tribute to a true genius that doesn't forget – in typical Delia Derbyshire fashion – to indulge in a few playful moments along the way." **BW**

10

Jockstrap
I Love You Jennifer B
ROUGH TRADE

"This astounding debut from London duo Georgia Ellery (Black Country, New Road) and Taylor Skye is a thing of wickedly surreal, esoteric beauty… Startlingly good." **VI**



11

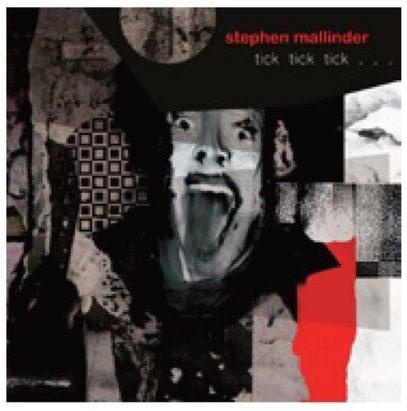
700 Bliss
Nothing To Declare
HYPERDUB

"700 Bliss say they have 'Nothing To Declare', but I'm convinced their subsonic bass is weaponised enough to cause alarm bells at airport security… a real wall-shaker." **FR**

12

Jean-Michel Jarre
Oxymore
SONY

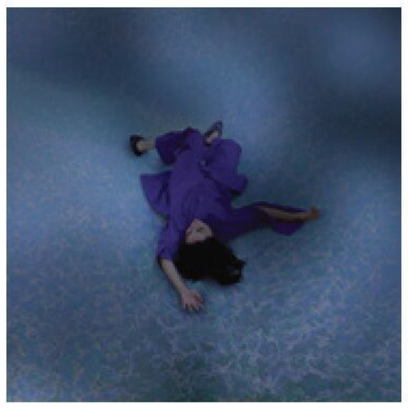
"A thrilling journey into multi-channel 3D binaural sound, JMJ's music on 'Oxymore' feels more ambitious and immersive than ever. 'Animal Genesis' places you in a dense, eerie rainforest, while 'Zeitgeist' feels like Kraftwerk larging it on techno. Magnificent." **VI**



13

Stephen Mallinder
Tick Tick Tick
DAIS

"The death of Richard H Kirk last year left a gaping hole for music fans looking for Cabaret Voltaire vibes in a modern era. Thank goodness Stephen Mallinder has rediscovered his solo groove in recent years. This ticks the boxes. All three of them." **FR**



14

Lucrecia Dalt
¡Ay!
RVNG INTL

"It's brave, exploratory and suffused with raw honesty – otherworldly and sometimes abstract, yet still overflowing with humanity. You might say the Colombian experimental musician's latest long-player is her most accessible to date." **JA**

15

Future Conditional
Isotech
SECOND LANGUAGE

"Future Conditional have crafted a truly special record here. It's closer to flawless than anything I've heard in a long time. Here's hoping we don't have to wait until 2037 for the follow-up." **P**

16

The Hardy Tree
Common Grounds
CLAY PIPE

"'Mist On The Playing Fields' boasts a throbbing electronic heartbeat, the lingering sugar rush of long-ago school kickabouts. On 'Face At The Window, Seaforth Crescent', keyboards dance across longwave static, a haunting memory of disturbing feelings amid dark Victorian houses." **BF**

17

Klaus Schulze
Deus Arrakis
SPV

"There's a poignancy here, when considered in the context of Schulze's recent passing. We find the Meister at his most sweetly melodic, with clusters of euphoric notes assembled like his myriad achievements, before fading into saddening quietude." **MS**

18

Soft Cell
Happiness Not Included
BMG

"Shot through with many of the traits that people took to in droves all those years ago. The singular juxtaposition of light theatrics and subterranean darkness, droll observational misanthropy and gut-wrenching heartbreak." **CG**

19

Nik Colk Void
Bucked Up Space
EDITIONS MEGO

"Ultimately, this is an album that lives in the details, requiring a forensic level of concentration, best exemplified in the three short musique concrète pieces that break up the structure. Uncompromising, challenging, unpredictable and utterly original – much like its creator." **MS**

20

The Comet Is Coming
Hyper-Dimensional Expansion Beam
IMPULSE!

"With the best modern-day electronic accoutrements at their disposal, what an exhilarating bitches brew of volatile magic, searing genius and sonic invention this pioneering sax, synth and drums trio conjure." **CG**

21

Various Artists
Eins Und Zwei Und Drei Und Vier Vol 2: Deutsche Experimentelle Pop-Musik 1978-1987
BUREAU B

"The second compilation of delightfully obscure German art-pop rarities from Hamburg's Bureau B mines even weirder depths than its 2021 predecessor. A generous, 20-track compendium, it serves as an odyssey through the hidden archives of proto-kosmische experimentation." **CC**

22

Blancmange

Private View

LONDON

"'Private View' is perhaps the closest Neil Arthur has come to slipping back into those old hit-maker clothes. Combined with the return to London Records, it's an album to warm the cockles of anyone raised on powdered food and 'Don't Tell Me'." **BF**

23

Brian Eno

ForeverAndEverNoMore

UMC

"Eno's attention charmingly switches from the moon's endless motion to microscopic worms. But it's his perfectly pitched voice that lingers, albeit in orbit around an ever-present abyss." **FR**

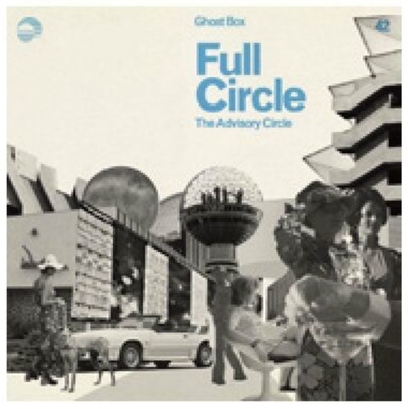
24

Kelly Lee Owens

LP.8

SMALLTOWN SUPERSOUND

"The grand and the grubby, offering some glorious musical contrasts. This 'pretend' eighth album does not deviate from that, despite being loftier than the club clobber of her previous work." **FR**



25

The Advisory Circle

Full Circle

GHOST BOX

"It's an album of double-edged nostalgia for both her own fractured childhood memories and the label's inaugural experiments. Cate Brooks' knack of investing melodic electronica with affectingly raw emotion remains unparalleled." **BF**

26

Various Artists

Cue Dot XIII: ReFabricated

CUE DOT

"Cue Dot have managed to set quite the standard for new electronic music in the UK – 'all created by human, machine and beautiful endeavour' – throughout these unnaturally testing times." **CG**

27

The Sound Of Science

The Sound Of Science

CASTLES IN SPACE

"Dean Honer's heady electronics combine with Kevin Pearce's folk sensibilities – most notably on 'The Water Cycle' – as various spoken interjections and facts (touching on atoms, the speed of light and more) convey a scientific 'sense of wonder'." **VI**

28

Simple Minds

Direction Of The Heart

BMG

"It might not be the record to win over a new generation, but there's something here for even the most casual Simple Minds listener. Big and clever in all the right ways." **AT**

29

Au Suisse

Au Suisse

CITY SLANG

"Opening track 'Control' builds from polished, future-pop iridescence to a cinematic, sci-fi-esque crescendo that properly summons goosebumps. The glossy 'Thing', meanwhile, bursts with slick bass grooves, retro cowbells, shimmering synths and soaring vocals." **CG**

30

Arp

New Pleasures

MEXICAN SUMMER

"Here we witness life in abundance, teeming with sounds and ideas, and a sophisticated, hyperreal veneer. It's a beautiful, absorbing, enigmatic and unique record, so where Arp can take this with the third instalment is anyone's guess." **JA**

31

Ghost Power

Ghost Power

DUOPHONIC SUPER 45s

"Imagine Barry Gray joining the Radiophonic Workshop in 1965 and asking Dick Mills to beef up his barking, brassy theme tunes with backwards tape loops of bubbles being blown through glasses of Corona Cream Soda. Yep, it's that good." **BF**

32

Rival Consoles
Now Is
ERASED TAPES

"Eight albums in, 'Now Is' finds Ryan Lee West at the apex of his game. The future possibilities seem endless, but for now, we have this glorious accomplishment to immerse ourselves in." **AT**

33

Hannah Peel &
Paraorchestra
The Unfolding
REAL WORLD

"In a world beset by shadows, Peel and her collaborators have created illuminated joy. As rippling synths succumb to orchestral bliss, even your stony old hills might be moved to salute a woman who is – to paraphrase – 'lying in the gullies, but looking at the stars'." **BF**

34

Caterina Barbieri
Spirit Exit
LIGHT-YEARS

"This is Barbieri at her most devastating. There's so much going on here, so many rapid introductions and removals of components, and such an abundance of melodies, counter-melodies and harmonic overtones that it feels like watching a time-lapse movie of the entirety of human consciousness." **MS**

35

Gabe Gurnsey
Diablo
PHANTASY SOUND

"Electro and Detroit techno vibes are channelled into pulsating, dancefloor-centric beats and rhythms, loaded with essential 'minor-key sadness'… The whole thing throbs with desire and lustful energy. Sexy. Ravey. Total killer, all thriller." **VI**

36

Rodney Cromwell
Memory Box
HAPPY ROBOTS

"The album's real strength comes from Cromwell's gift for melody. Take 'Opus Three', a pop hit in an alternative universe where New Order pressed Stylophones into service. It very nearly slips the tethers of the DIY aesthetic to soar into a blue sky of pop possibilities." **MR**

37

Wolfgang Flür
Magazine 1
CHERRY RED

"A long-player as a lifestyle monthly. It's a place where fact and fiction blur into each other, where the high gloss of the beautifully melodic electronics and sharp beats provide the glossy pages for Flür to file his copy." **MR**

38

Charlotte Adigéry
& Bolis Pupul
Topical Dancer
DEEWEE

"'Topical Dancer' is intent on putting the world to rights. It's more focused and political than its predecessor, although there's still a wry sense of humour at play. A riot of beats and consciousness." **JA**

39

Richie Culver
I Was Born By The Sea
REIF

"Across eight tracks, bleak and chilly electronics provide a canvas for Culver's brusque Humberside spoken word. A knack for dry aphorisms is an artistic hallmark, his text-based paintings graffitied with lines like 'I did not get into art school but I got into Berghain'." **CF**

40

Gigi Masin
Vahinè
LANGUAGE OF SOUND

"The Rhodes piano on 'Valerie Crossing' gingerly edges its way up and down the keyboard, with unresolved notes that creep into many of the climactic moments. Another beautiful turn from the maestro of emotive ambient." **BW**

41

The Black Dog
Music For Photographers
DUST SCIENCE

"More than just simple background music for photographers, this is a highly absorbing and often emotive snapshot, the sound of a distinguished and revered electronic band still cutting it after 30 years. Highly recommended." **VI**

42

Kaitlyn Aurelia Smith

Let's Turn It Into Sound

GHOSTLY INTERNATIONAL

"Before we know it, we're in the middle of a staggering jazz-funk workout. It feels like a conundrum that will never solve itself, but that's the fun. The more you play this album, the more its unconventional structure embeds." **FR**

43

Cate Le Bon

Pompeii

MEXICAN SUMMER

"Le Bon's sixth studio album was written primarily on bass guitar, and the warmth of that instrument underpins what is hands-down her smoothest and most beguiling effort to date." **CF**

44

Tears For Fears

The Tipping Point

CONCORD

"There are plenty of moments that feature the very specific though hard-to-define magic we call Tears For Fears. It's great to have them back once again, writing songs that permanently imprint themselves in your head." **JA**

45

Helen Ganya

Polish The Machine

BELLA UNION

"Mixing art-pop, dreampop, atmospherics and psychedelia, this record thrums with energy, confidence and euphoria, making it a startlingly original statement that should make her name." **AT**

46

Tangerine Dream

Raum

KSCOPE

"The album is built on Edgar Froese's old Cubase arrangements alongside an Otari tape archive stretching back 45 years. Not that it's easy to tell the old from the new, as this is a superbly kinetic flow of symphonic instrumentals." **FR**

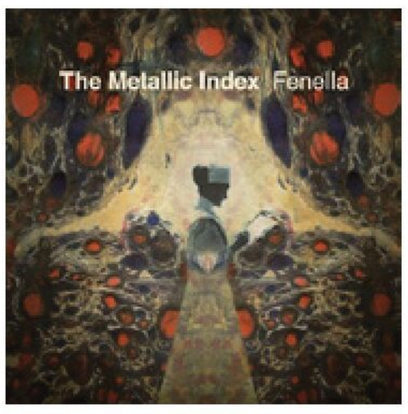
47

Sarah Davachi

Two Sisters

LATE MUSIC

"'Two Sisters', like all of Davachi's work, exemplifies the ambitious compositions, willingness towards experimentation and musical virtuosity that lie at the heart of prog rock. These qualities are all in rich, resonant effect here." **CF**



48

Fenella

The Metallic Index

FIRE

"The second long-player from this Jane Weaver-led trio, and a welcome return to the radiophonic, kosmische sounds of Weaver's 'The Silver Globe' and 'Modern Kosmology' albums. This is electronica as an enveloping tonal journey, chiming and pulsating with analogue life." **JB**

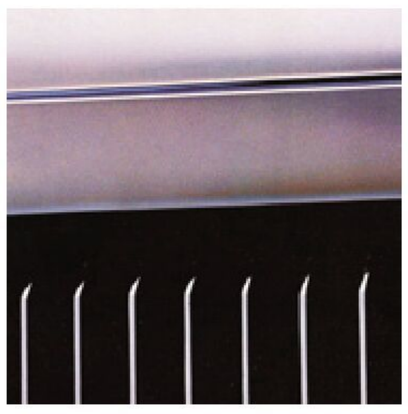
49

Gemma Cullingford

Tongue Tied

ELMO RECORDINGS

"Sink Ya Teeth's Gemma Cullingford has developed a confident and coherent voice that finds her moving far beyond the pensive confessionals of last year's solo debut, 'Let Me Speak'. A spellbinding album." **MJ**



50

Tony Price

Mark VI

TELEPHONE EXPLOSION

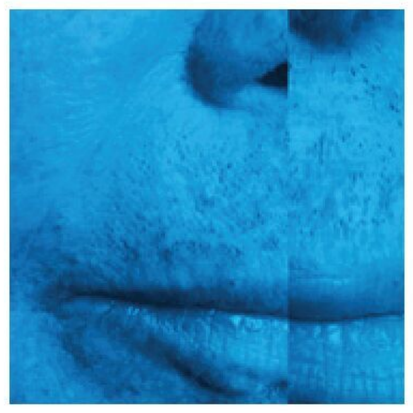
"Hypnotic beats provide limitless fuel… 'Learning From Las Vegas' is sleazy sax solos and deliciously filthy bass, 'Aerosol' and '115 BPM' are squelchy, old-school house, heightened by the howls of late-night sirens and police radio chatter. It's a hell of a trip." **BF**

REVIEWS BY:
JEREMY ALLEN, JOE BANKS, CLAIRE CARROLL, BOB FISCHER, CLAIRE FRANCIS, CARL GRIFFIN, VELIMIR ILIC, MARTIN JAMES, BEN MURPHY, PUSH, FAT ROLAND, MARK ROLAND, MAT SMITH, ANTHONY THORNTON, BEN WILLMOTT

ISSUE RESEARCH:
IMOGEN BEBB

With ‘a hAon’ and ‘a Dó’ sharing the top spot in our Albums Of The Year, **Telefís** have achieved a truly remarkable feat. Vocalist Cathal Coughlan sadly passed away earlier this year, so uber-producer Garret “Jacknife” Lee steps forward to accept the award

INTERVIEW: VELIMIR ILIC



Congratulations, Garret! Time for your acceptance speech…

“Cathal was the spokesperson of Telefís but it’s up to me now and I am absolutely speechless… seriously shocked. I don’t believe it. This is a first for me. Album Of The Year?!

“It was a life highlight for me to reconnect and work with Cathal. I never really stopped being the teenage boy in awe of him. Even though we knew each other years ago, he wasn’t aware of the high regard I held him in. To hear these are albums of the year in Electronic Sound would’ve bowled Cathal over. So while I’m happy the albums have been honoured in this way, I’m sad that he doesn’t get the same surge of excitement and shock that I’m feeling. I can’t remember being this surprised by anything. Album Of The Year is always something other records get, not ours. Thank you!”

How did the albums take shape?

“The concept of ‘a Dó’ followed on from ‘a hAon’ in an obvious way to us. ‘a hAon’ looks from a late 1960s/early 1970s position of a monochromatic, depressed Ireland, as filtered through the music that was emerging from New York, England and Germany.

“The first day we spoke on the phone, we talked about Throbbing Gristle, Suicide, and Kraftwerk’s ‘Radioactivity’. Then the conversation moved to the Catholic church’s influence on [Irish national broadcaster] RTÉ in that period, along with the occult and pagan practices of rural Ireland that had survived. The whole Telefís concept arrived in that single conversation. For ‘a Dó’, we moved forward in time to the mid-to -late 70s and introduced colour into the artwork, in a similar way to Kraftwerk’s ‘The Man-Machine’ following ‘Radioactivity’, and black and white to colour TV.”

The two albums feel like you and Cathal really connected. His lyrical dexterity and angular storytelling were something else. What was he like to work with?

“Cathal was very, very funny. Mischievous, in a boyish way. That, combined with his high intelligence, made working with him a thrill. I’d jot down music, books and films that he’d be enthusing about. We’d start a call with purpose and quickly lose track of time, never getting to the reason we were on the call in the first place.

“I stayed out of his way when it came to lyrics, and he didn’t get that involved with the music, which I think was novel and a bit of a relief for him. The records were happening so quickly that we never discussed anything we’d finished – we were too excited to get to the next song.

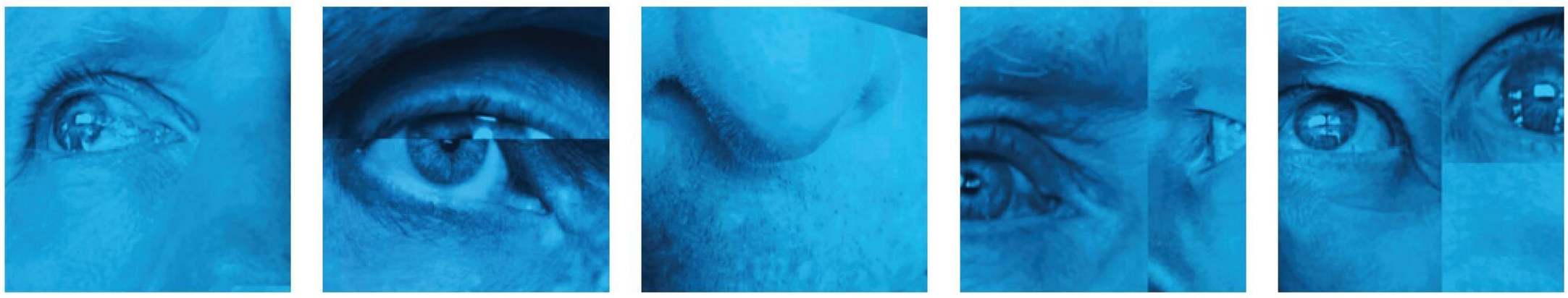
“Cathal was far more gentle, sensitive and loving than the ferocious man I last met during his Fatima Mansions years – he was very careful to not offend or upset anyone. He was full of ideas and that was lovely to witness. Our friendship developed easily and quickly, and it was a total joy to become close with him.”

Both ‘a hAon’ and ‘a Dó’ are a satirical exploration of the Irish pop culture you and Cathal grew up with. Why has that left such an indelible mark on you?

“It’s our childhood. Ireland was fucking bizarre in the 70s and 80s – a corrupt and weird country controlled by a church that had no interest in spirituality. It was the beginning of a modern culture. One day, TV arrived and we got to see the outside world – glam, punk rock and post-punk gave us another way to escape, and we took it. We both left the place as young men and a part of us is stuck in that period. We just wanted to remember the oddness of it – what Thomas Leer’s ‘Private Plane’ did to our minds when we were living there. The power it gave us.”

‘a Dó’ in particular feels very textural, with impeccable layers of detail and a real edge to its groove. Were there specific sonic influences that inspired it?

“‘a Dó’ has a wider palette than ‘a hAon’. I got a few Soviet synths just when we started the record. The sounds of Throbbing Gristle, The Normal, Thomas Leer and Suicide would be our North Star but we went off in a lot of other directions… Yellow Magic Orchestra, Haroumi Hosono, Conny Plank. Everything was up for grabs… disco, Afrobeat, electro, dub, punk, hip hop and krautrock, all clashing together.”



Was there a moment when you were making these albums where you thought, "We've really got something here"?

"I was quite nervous sending Cathal backing tracks because I didn't want him to be disappointed by any of them. We worked pretty quickly sending our parts back and forth, but had to spread the writing out over a few months. Cathal's medical treatments were difficult on him and we'd shut down for a while each time. I don't know how he did it, really.

"It was only after we finished 'On A Country Road', the last song on 'a Dó', did I think, 'This is a good album'. Once we finished it, we started on another record, 'a Trí', which we didn't get to finish. I love these records and don't feel like I made them. They seemed to appear without much thought or work. I was blessed to have worked with Cathal."

You've described Telefís as some of the most enjoyable and rewarding music that you've been involved with. Why is that?

"Some records can be painful to make – dramatic, even traumatic. Telefís was easy. It was egoless and felt effortless, even though we both struggled at times. I love it when a record, a sound or a lyric makes me giddy. Most, if not all, Telefís songs make me giddy.

"My favourite track, 'Feed The Light' [from 'a Dó'], is romantic yet embedded with deep melancholy. Cathal's voice, combined with my two daughters in the chorus, just floors me. When he sings, 'These green shoots of June nonetheless bloom / All that you've been is dots on a screen', it reminds me why I've always loved him."

How did you amass enough material for two albums in a year?

"You can do a lot when you're trying to impress somebody. I was always trying to impress Cathal. I'm not sure he was used to working at such a pace – it was like running or tumbling down a hill. To be honest, we also knew we didn't have much time. It was a distraction from Cathal's illness and all the terrible things that go along with that, a way of being intimate with each other, entertaining each other. Making these records was so much fun for us."

What's on the horizon for 2023?

"I've been working with [American musician] Lonnie Holley, and we have an album coming out in early 2023. He's become an important person in my life and has changed the way I think about creativity. [Malian singer] Rokia Koné and I will be touring at some point later in the year. And I've just begun working with Les Amazones D'Afrique – it's quite a thrill to be involved with them.

"We've also got the beginnings of what would've been Telefís' 'a Trí' and I'd like to see if we have anything worth hearing. So, 2023 is going to be busy. I haven't been this excited about making music since… well, ever."

If there was a prize for winning our Album Of The Year, and you could pick anything, what would you choose?

"I won an award a few years ago for production, and they gave a microphone as the trophy. Initially, I thought it was just a fake mic but it wasn't. I unscrewed it from its little plinth and was very surprised to see a place to plug a cable in – it worked, and sounded great! This being Electronic Sound, I'm fantasising that the prize would be a newly refurbished Ursa Major Space Station. It's a weird and unique effects rack from the 80s that would give me immense pleasure, and up my game considerably."

'a Dó' and 'a hAon' are both out now on Dimple Discs

INTERSTELLAR OVERDRIVE

Andy Turner and Ed Handley return with Plaid's euphoric 'Feorm Falorx', an intriguing concept album about performing at an intergalactic festival on a distant planet. As you do. Stand by for stories about their time in The Black Dog and working with Björk

WORDS: STEPHEN DALTON
PICTURES: EMMA CATNIP

On a bright autumn afternoon in suburban north London, veteran electro explorers Plaid appraise me of their recent musical mission to outer space. Over ferociously strong coffee and a kitchen table groaning with homemade cakes, Andy Turner and Ed Handley recount boldly going to the faraway planet of Falorx to play an extraterrestrial music festival that inspired the gloopy, shiny, funky, dreamy, retro-futuristic sounds of their excellent new album, 'Feorm Falorx'.

After making their epic cosmic journey on a spaceship called The Campbell, the duo tell me they had to convert their physical forms into light to survive the planet's atmosphere. Had they perhaps consumed any, er, refreshing stimulants before or during their intergalactic trip?

"Not at all," Turner insists. "The thing with Falorx is that it's a very intense environment. We can best describe what happened as being turned into light – you're not physically there, so you can't really consume anything. It's more like your consciousness is there. There is a physical form but it's not physics as we know it."

Uh-huh… sure, Jim. As fate would have it, no recording devices are allowed on Falorx, so we only have the pair's word that they were there. The festival also operates a strict ban on cameras, much like Berlin's notorious techno palace, Berghain. Hang on, are Plaid *totally* sure that this gig didn't actually take place in Berghain?

"Hmmm," Turner frowns. "It didn't *feel* like Berghain…"

While Turner maintains an impressively deadpan manner throughout this whimsical flimflam, Handley struggles to keep a straight face. One of the most unassuming and unpretentious bands from the fertile early wave of post-rave electronica, Plaid have never been especially conceptual in approach, so this goofy sci-fi backstory is new territory for them.

In fairness, the Falorx angle seems to be driven more by the album's visual dimension, which incorporates dazzling promo videos and live graphics generated using cutting-edge AI software, and even a spin-off illustrated mini-novel, 'Journey To Feorm Falorx'. At a handful of test gigs – dry runs for a full tour – the visuals have proved a hit.

"The aliens loved it and humans seem to love it too," Turner nods. "We generally have pretty good vibes at our shows."

The roots of Plaid lie not in deep space, of course, but in rural East Anglia. Which is close, but not quite the same thing. Although Handley grew up in Cambridge and Turner in Windsor, they both spent their teens in the sleepy Suffolk town of Stowmarket. They first met at school, bonding over a shared love of hip hop, electronic music and breakdancing. The duo still go misty-eyed about StreetSounds, the cult label formed by Morgan Khan in 1982, which helped lay the ground for the rave and techno boom in Britain with its seminal series of electro, hi-NRG and early rap compilations.

"Morgan Khan was so influential," Handley says.

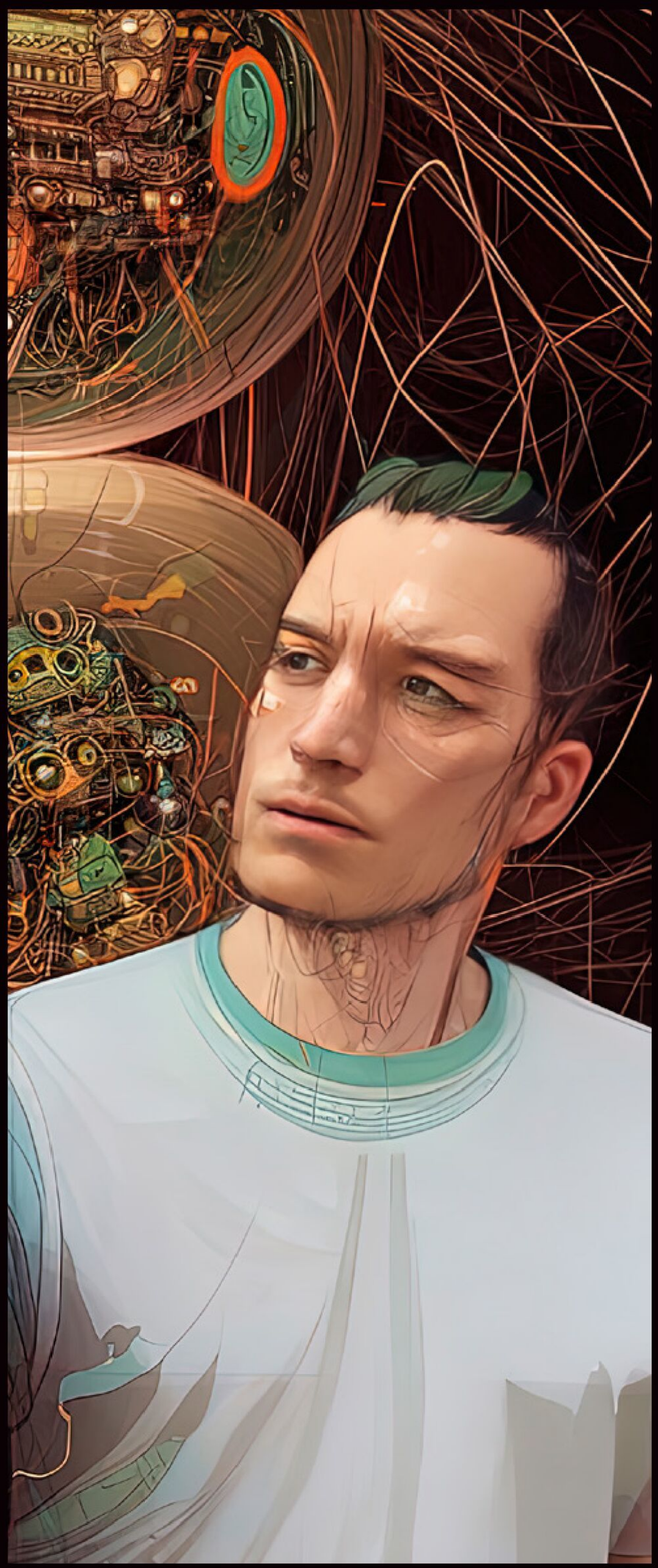
"It was all hip hop back then," Turner adds. "Then it sort of split off into electro and rap in the early 90s. My first job interview was for StreetSounds! And I got the job, but I was living outside London so I lost it. I guess I would have been doing promotion or something. This was before I started making music. I was quite a young teenager."

Turner and Handley began collaborating in their late teens with the basic tools of the emerging DIY electro era – an Akai sampler, Roland keyboards, primitive sequencers and drum machines. Moving down to London in 1987, they went on to form techno collective The Black Dog with Ken Downie, having answered his advert in NME. They also immersed themselves in the semi-underground acid house, warehouse party and pirate radio scenes. Finding a booming urban subculture of like-minded electronic fans was life-changing for two young chancers from Suffolk.

"I'm not sure it changed the world as much as we hoped," Handley frowns. "You could argue we all failed. But yeah, on an individual level you met lots of people whose lives were affected in a lovely way. They became more open and less judgmental, avoiding the class system in the UK and all the stereotypes that went with it. That just fell away with some people, which was a brilliant thing."

It was a hedonistic, druggy scene, Turner recalls.

"We did all our partying before we started writing – in the late 1980s, on the cusp of us starting to put music together," he says. "So the first things that we were writing were super-influenced by those huge parties. It was such a mash-up of different styles and loads of stuff that we hadn't been exposed to before."



But contrary to popular opinion, Handley argues that mind-altering chemicals and electronic music are not natural bedfellows.

"You need to know when to stop," he insists. "You can't really write music and be that hedonistic, especially if you're using computers and electronics – it's a complete nightmare if you're too out of it. In the scenes we were part of, there were quite a lot of drugs, but at some point you've got to decide. We did plenty of it to know that there's some teaching and some learning, but there's also some destruction."

Following a lengthy run of DIY releases, The Black Dog finally landed a deal with the groundbreaking Warp label, which remains Plaid's home to this day. Turner remembers the fax that Warp's late co-founder Rob Mitchell sent from Sheffield way back in 1992, after the band released their debut album, 'Mbuki Mvuki'.

"Warp were huge," he says. "We were aware of their purple label releases, of course. Then one day, we got a fax from Rob – I think we've still got it. He liked a track on the first album called 'Scoobs In Columbia'. Yeah, we were very lucky… there weren't that many people making this kind of music back then."

Meanwhile, at home in Suffolk, the late, great Radio 1 DJ John Peel was another early champion of Turner and Handley, in both their Black Dog and Plaid guises. Indeed, Peel once claimed to have seen the teenage duo breakdancing on the mean streets of Stowmarket. Turner disputes this, but they were certainly close neighbours.

"John Peel used to live just down the road from my folks," he recalls. "We used to see him quite a lot. I remember going over there with my dad and dropping off test pressings to him. He played some Black Dog stuff really early on."

The duo's six-year collaboration with Downie as The Black Dog proved fruitful but fractious, spanning three well-regarded albums plus multiple EPs and related releases under various incarnations. But tensions grew between them, eventually leading to a falling out and their split in 1995. Shortly after, Plaid made the leap from side project to standalone band with their own Warp deal. So why Plaid?

"We were trying to come up with the least glamorous name we could," explains Handley.

"Many years after we were called Plaid, we started to find some reasons why we might be called Plaid," Turner adds, laughing. "The thinking originally was like in American movies… when you come back from the office, you take off your suit and put on a plaid shirt. I guess in those early days we were still doing regular jobs, so it made sense. But then we decided we didn't like that reason, so we made up other ones, ha!"

By the mid-90s, The Black Dog had already forged a profile-boosting connection as one of Björk's hand-picked harem of electronic collaborators. Plaid continued this partnership, remixing several of the Icelandic art-pop queen's tracks, including 'Big Time Sensuality' and 'All Is Full Of Love'.

Björk then invited the duo onto the latter half of her marathon 'Post' tour, travelling across Asia and South America for almost a year. After they returned to London, she sang lead vocals on 'Lilith' for the second Plaid album, 1997's 'Not For Threes'. Working with an artist of Björk's starry stature, both in a business and creative sense, left a deep impression.

"We learned how to be a bit more professional because there was no room for mistakes," Handley laughs. "I think up to that point we'd been working around the rave scene and it was quite slapdash. We'd have lots of crashes while we were playing because we were using a laptop and it would go down mid-set. So it was that, and also just a glimpse of how it could be when you make lots of money, staying in nice hotels…"

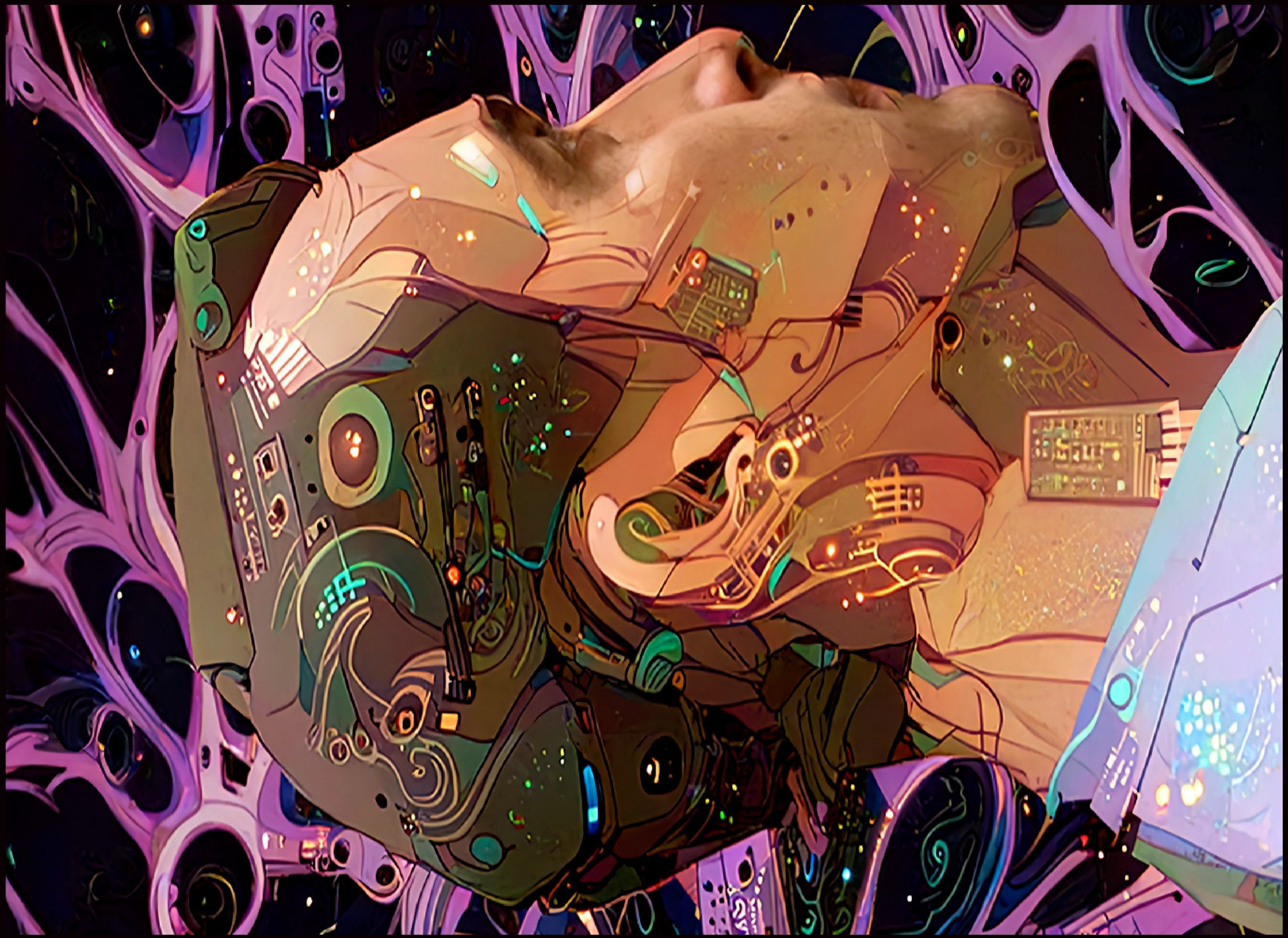
Most of all, Handley recalls, working with Björk was a galvanising lesson in how pop music can be a passionate, personal, progressive art form.

"It was more her dedication and devotion, and the team around her," he nods. "It was partly about making money, but you could see it was driven by this burning energy to create and to do new stuff. That was very inspiring. It wasn't really a commercial endeavour – there was something else going on that was important to her existence. It confirmed to us that with a certain amount of dedication, you can make it work."

The duo haven't worked with Björk for 25 years, but they remain on friendly terms. Indeed, by coincidence, our interview takes place hours before their latest London reunion.

"We're going to see her tonight, actually," Turner says with a matter-of-fact shrug. "She's got a listening party for her new album."

The kitchen is suddenly full of glittery magic as the classiest, most casual name-drop in history hangs in the air.



Creative partners since the 80s and with their 30th Warp anniversary looming, Plaid have sustained a long-haul career without ever being too troubled by the ebbs and flows of fashion. They rarely score high chart placings or big-selling albums. Even so, unlike many of their peers, they remain full-time musicians, plotting their own eccentric course between Planet Earth and Planet Plaid.

"We kind of bob along around zero all the time," Turner says. "But we are incredibly fortunate to be able to do that. So many artists have other jobs or just a bit of time in the evenings. We're lucky enough to have been able to do this professionally since 1996. I feel so grateful for that. I really hated working for other people, so it's been perfect for me."

"We've had some dire moments but we've managed to survive," Handley admits. "We have done a few other little things when asked, like teaching and academic work, because we've learned a fair bit of technical stuff over the years. But we haven't had to do that for financial reasons… yet. Ha!"

Perhaps the secret of Plaid's longevity is that rather than being narrow techno purists, they've always brought organic elements and acoustic instruments into their luminous and expansive electronic canvas. As well as working with Björk, their back catalogue includes wide-ranging collaborations with singers such as Nicolette, video artist Bob Jaroc, the animated film director Michael Arias, Indonesian gamelan composer Rahayu Supanggah and more. They also have an ongoing musical partnership with guitarist and violinist Benet Walsh, aka Mason Bee. The closest thing to a third Plaid member, Walsh brings moody post-punk textures to 'Nightcrawler', one of the standout tracks on 'Feorm Falorx'.

Plaid's signature brand of electronica has always been promiscuous, inclusive and hard to categorise. Over the years, they've been labelled IDM, post-techno, ambient and more. But their default setting is essentially pop in the best sense – vivid and funky, melodic and infectious. Pop is not a dirty word on Planet Plaid. Indeed, they baulk at being described as an experimental band.

"The pop industry is pretty ugly, but a lot of pop music is great," Handley says. "We do like to experiment, but when you hear the stuff that gets called experimental, we are quite a long way from that. There is always a pop and electro thing going on with us. Our work is pretty broad, but it's mostly informed by dance music."

This is certainly evident at Plaid's high-energy live shows, which draw a lively raver contingent alongside the obligatory middle-aged techno chin-strokers.

"A bit of both is great," Handley grins. "Having people dancing at the front really makes a difference. If there are a few really good dancers, then everyone else feels comfortable dancing."

"We have a pretty mixed crowd compared to some artists," Turner agrees. "It's not 100 per cent men with beards. I think we still have a lot of fun in us. It's not completely serious all the time."

Andy Turner and Ed Handley are essentially still teenage b-boys at heart. Even in their early 50s, they are always on the verge of doing the electric boogaloo, at least in their minds. When was the last time Plaid actually did any breakdancing?

"Not recently," Turner sighs. "Occasionally, when I'm extremely drunk, I try something. But yeah, the whole weight distribution thing has changed enormously."

Crucially, for all its conceptual 'Star Trek' trimmings, 'Feorm Falorx' is a classic Plaid album, with three decades of post-rave electro goodness squeezed into its kinetic, fizzing, radiant grooves. If it summons up vintage dance-pop memories from the late 80s, that's no accident.

"It's a very conscious decision," Turner says. "When we were putting this together, going back to the Feorm Festival, we wanted to give aliens a selection of the music we love. So I think this album does unashamedly look back at the 80s, and even the 70s on one track. We just wanted to do something that represented our 30 years so far, from where we started to where we're going."

Falorx certainly sounds like a fun place to visit, but only for a short while. There are countless other musical galaxies out there waiting to be explored, but right now, the weather on Planet Plaid is pretty fine.

'Feorm Falorx' is out now on Warp

PHOTO: BARRIE WENTZELL

DA DOO RON RON

Brass knuckledusters, adjustable spanners, Pink Floyd collaborations and a surprising surplus of Bramley apples. In a secluded nook of East Sussex lies the unusual world of Ron Geesin

WORDS: BOB FISCHER

"I was playing banjo with an amateur jazz band called Mahogany Wardrope's Pinetop Stompers," recalls a twinkly-eyed Ron Geesin, harking back to his teenage years in the late 1950s. "It was formed by a man called Paul Wardrope as a play on his name. I was 16, it was the teddy boy era, and we were playing in a very low-class area of Glasgow. I went to the toilet for a pee and this proper teddy boy came in. Sideburns, shoes, jacket – the lot. I was brought up in a middle-class village in Lanarkshire, and I couldn't understand anything he was saying – 'Fuckthisandfuckthat…' – as he was fitting a metal object onto his hand. I'd never heard of such a thing, but it was a brass knuckleduster.

"At that moment, Mr Wardrope, who was better acquainted with the local colloquialisms, came in purely by chance and translated. This teddy boy had mistakenly thought I was a member of a rival gang and was going to put me straight through the window. If Paul hadn't appeared when he did, I might not be here today…"

Down a leafy lane in a quiet corner of East Sussex lives one of Britain's most idiosyncratic composers. Ron Geesin and his wife Frankie – a respected textiles artist – have been married for 56 years and have lived here for 51 of them, in a rambling smallholding festooned with overburdened fruit trees.

"Help yourself to apples," says Frankie as we potter around the kitchen. "We're overrun with Bramleys this year."

Geesin and I decamp to his studio outbuilding, which is also overburdened – this time with the fruits of six decades' worth of musical invention. There are racks of banjos, a Steinway grand piano and an original 1981 Fairlight synthesiser. His career has encompassed traditional jazz, tape manipulation, orchestral arrangement, electronic composition, film soundtracks, library music and an infamous collaboration with Pink Floyd.

It's difficult to know where to start, so we plump for the beginning. Undeterred by the threat of brass knuckledusters, Geesin left his Scottish home at the age of 17 to play piano with a professional touring jazz band, The Original Downtown Syncopators. But his expanding musical interests were already causing him frustration.

"I was at a dead end and I couldn't stand remaining with that band," he says. "John RT Davies, restorer of jazz 78s and my great guru, had a sister with a vacant basement flat in Notting Hill, and Frankie and I moved in. John was using tape all the time. That's how he devised methods of de-clicking scratched 78s. So when I visited him in his studio in Buckinghamshire, I was watching him.

"I was also listening to the BBC's Third Programme, and by 1965 they were playing a lot of electronic music. Somewhere, I've got 40 or 50 spools of tape that I recorded off-air. So I was coming out of the jazz band and listening to Arnold Schoenberg and Anton Webern."

In the interim, Geesin briefly joined one of the most successful novelty bands of the post-war years, playing raucous, speeded-up versions of classical favourites – a venture that brought him into contact with another frustrated musical pioneer, Gavin Bryars.

"I joined Dr Crock And His Crackpots in their revival years," he chuckles. "By then they were shagged-out toothless wrecks, but they'd been quite famous in the 1940s. And that's how I met Gavin. He was playing bass in a northern working men's club, accompanying the likes of Shirley Bassey and Max Bygraves. I was doing solo piano pieces with the Crackpots, and he said, 'That's interesting – where did you get those from?'. And when he came to London, he stayed in our flat, sleeping on the floor at 34 Elgin Crescent.

"He was a cunning bastard. He always managed to get out of doing the washing up."

Geesin's debut album, 'A Raise Of Eyebrows', released in 1967, remains a fascinating summation of his influences to that point. Opening with an alarming collage of sinister chuckles, smashing glass and rugby commentary, it delves down a Lewis Carroll rabbit hole of wheezing harmoniums, thunderously rhythmic piano workouts and laconic monologues ("Humans pulsate! / Where? / Somewhere else…"). These glorious early explorations drew him to the attention of the BBC Radiophonic Workshop. Was he, as rumour has it, headhunted?

"Yes, if you want to put it so dramatically!" he laughs. "Desmond Briscoe did ask if I wanted to join. I went on a guided tour, but thought, 'No'. I wanted to keep my independence. Not realising, of course, that lots of the best work went to people within the Radiophonic Workshop – film and TV jobs you'd never get outside."

Emerging psychedelic trailblazers were also paying attention. Geesin became friends with Pink Floyd's Roger Waters, and the duo composed the soundtrack for Roy Battersby's scientific documentary film, 'The Body'. Sounding like lost episodes of Geesin's beloved 'Goon Show', track titles include 'More Than Seven Dwarfs In Penis-Land' and 'Mrs Throat Goes Walking'.

Then, with Pink Floyd struggling to complete their 1970 long-player, 'Atom Heart Mother', before an impending US tour, Geesin was asked to perform a salvage operation. Presented with a raw backing track, he composed sections for cello, a 10-part brass ensemble and the 20-piece John Alldis Choir to forge the album's 23-minute opening suite.

Is he tired of talking about it, I wonder? His 2013 book 'The Flaming Cow: The Making Of Pink Floyd's Atom Heart Mother', recently reissued in paperback with an added chapter, feels like it may have been intended as the final word.

"No," he insists. "I wrote the book because, in some big Pink Floyd documentary, David Gilmour said, 'Oh, we got Geesin in to do some arranging'. And I thought, 'You bastard!'. That's what encouraged me to put down how it really was.

"They went away to America and left me to get on with it. The reason it works is the difference between Pink Floyd's vision and mine. To make it interesting for me, I had to weave around their backing track. Sometimes I'm going against it, coming in at right angles from where you think it's going. I join it, then I split off again and go somewhere else, and I conjured melodies Pink Floyd couldn't have thought of if they'd tried.

"It's the friction between those elements that make it work. They were only thinking about *them*, as Pink Floyd. So later, you had Roger Waters saying, 'If you gave me a million pounds, I wouldn't play that rubbish'. Nick Mason, with his Saucerful Of Secrets band, is now playing a version of it – but it misrepresents the whole idea of that friction.

"They trot out all the lighter bits," he adds, grinning mischievously.

Even Geesin's frustrations are laced with good-natured humour. And the differences don't seem terminal – Mason contributes a gentlemanly preface to 'The Flaming Cow'. Have either Waters or Gilmour commented much on the book?

"I visited Dave and took him a copy," he confides. "And he said, 'I think this might make me slightly annoyed'."

So why are we here? Well, as Spike Milligan once so pithily put it, "Everybody has to be somewhere". But, ostensibly, we're discussing Trunk Records' release of 'Sunday Bloody Sunday' – a selection of Geesin's early soundtracks.

John Schlesinger's 1971 film, which provides the album's title, heralded the director's return to homespun British film-making after a Hollywood excursion for 'Midnight Cowboy'. Its sensitive, semi-acoustic score – the perfect accompaniment to the tangled love life of the bisexual sculptor played by Murray Head – makes up Side One, while Side Two features excerpts from the Channel 4 documentary 'Viv', and the darker, more electronic soundtrack to a 1970 BBC documentary.

"'Shapes In A Wilderness' was about art therapy in mental hospitals bringing out whatever subconscious notions the patients had," explains Geesin. "One man was painting away furiously with his tongue sticking out, and there was a window behind him. He stopped suddenly, turned to the camera and said, 'They're all mad out there, you know'. Fantastic! In true Lewis Carroll tradition, everything should be looked at upside down. Or back to front.

"John Schlesinger saw 'Shapes In A Wilderness' and said, 'I must have that composer for my next film'. So the big men in black coats paid me a visit. I thought, 'Christ, I can't handle this', and I asked Steve O'Rourke, Pink Floyd's manager, to do the deal. We met the producers around a table – not quite as long as Vladimir Putin's table, but a big table in a big office in central London. We were on one side, they were on the other, and they opened their briefcases really slowly.

"Steve said, 'Alright boys, what have you got?'. They mentioned a figure, and he stood up and walked very deliberately to the door. But just before he got there, they said, 'Hold on a minute', and the fee was suddenly doubled. And that gave us the deposit for the place you're sittingin now… 1971 was when we built this padded cell of a studio."

It was a rare old time. 'The Body', 'Atom Heart Mother', 'Shapes In A Wilderness' and 'Sunday Bloody Sunday' were all completed within the space of a year. Geesin also lent luscious production to 'Songs For The Gentle Man', the 1971 second album of folk singer Bridget St John. He was in demand, darting between the biggest studios in London with the cream of the capital's classical players at his behest. He could easily have become the wild card producer of the 1970s rock world's leading lights. So why did he retreat to the solitude of East Sussex?

"We had two small kids and life was becoming intolerable," he sighs. "I was scared and I needed to get out. I was doing so much work that I was cracking up. That can happen. Moving down here, I tended to withdraw from working with other musicians. I developed my multitracking capabilities instead and that then dictated the kind of stuff I was doing…"

That "kind of stuff" included library music. In 1972 and 1975 respectively, Geesin recorded two 'Electrosound' records for the KPM label. They comprise deliriously evocative synth instrumentals, liable to flood anyone raised in the era of BBC Schools programmes (viewed on "the big telly") with an overwhelming nostalgia for Spam fritters.

"The first 'Electrosound' came about because I had done 'The Body'," he says. "The boss of KPM thought there were some interesting noises there and asked if I'd like to make an album of library music, which at that point I knew nothing about, so I just went away and played. On an EMS VCS3, sir! It's down there somewhere, sitting in its suitcase."

Both 'Electrosound' records, I venture, are beautifully redolent of a period when preschool infants were routinely presented with swathes of electronic music from the fringes of the avant-garde. From the corner of the studio, Geesin is staring at me with genial disapproval. He wags a finger.

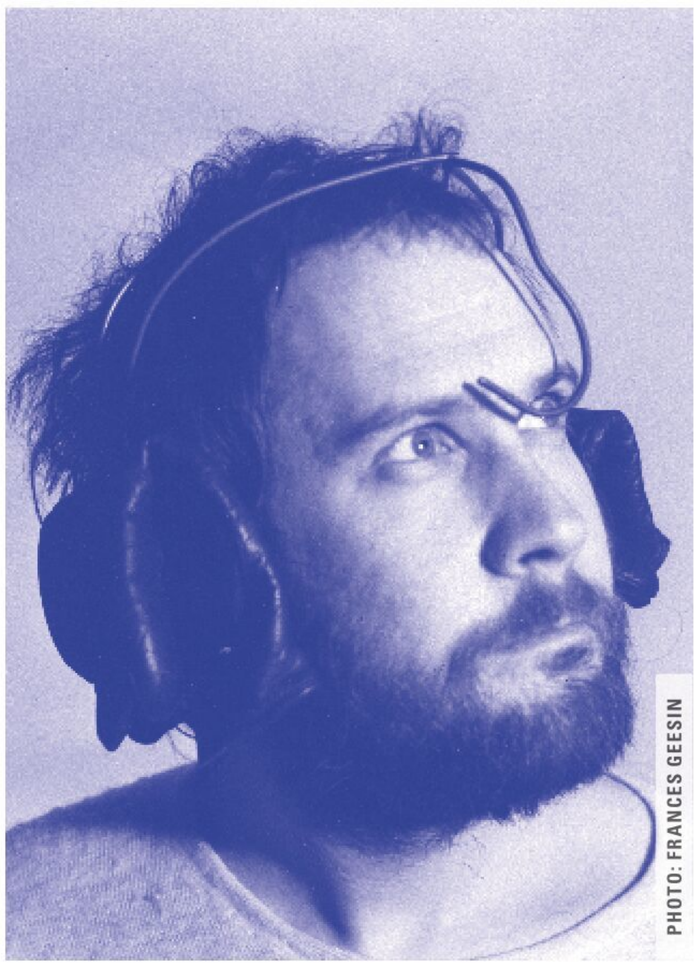


PHOTO: FRANCES GEESIN

"You've just used *two* terrible words there. 'Avant' *and* 'garde'."

Sorry. How about experimental?

"No! That's another word I never use!"

Outré? Esoteric?

"Passionate!" he laughs. "I've always said the easiest place to hide is in the avant-garde. I cite Edgard Varèse, that great and totally original composer. One of the last pieces he did was 'Poème Électronique', written for the World's Fair in Brussels in 1958. For me, that piece has never been bettered. Paraphrasing what Varèse said, 'Nothing I've ever done is experimental. Everything has been completely considered'.

"That's an important point. To me, 'avant-garde' and 'experimental' are terms that have been devised to explain the unexplainable and to side-step embracing the fun of it all. If someone doesn't understand something, they just want it to be pigeonholed."

Can we say "eccentric", though? Because there's an air of delicious eccentricity hanging over the Geesin household like an autumnal mist. In an adjacent outbuilding, he talks me through his comprehensive collection of adjustable spanners. There are literally thousands of them, mounted on whitewashed boards and divided into countries of origin. He's written two books about their history.

"An escape," he smiles.

From what?

"From composing fucking music."

So is there a Ron Geesin philosophy of life? We've been talking for over two hours now. It's been a delight, but I feel like we need a conclusion. We hark back to the late 1950s and the brass knuckledusters of Glasgow's most jazz-averse teddy boy.

"After surviving the 'Great Toilet Incident' as a teenager, I realised that humour was essential to human existence," he says. "So from that moment on, I used it to draw the sting out of any potentially dangerous situations. It fed into my live performances and it runs all the way through to my work today.

"One of the ways I've got through life more or less successfully is by seeing the fun in everything I do. And by only ever believing what's in front of me. I've got to play a note on the piano to believe that I can actually play a note on the piano."

There's something Taoist about that...

"Yes!" he exclaims. "The nearest thing I've got to a Bible is 'The Importance Of Living' by Lin Yutang. It was pretty famous when he wrote it in the 1930s, and it's so down-to-earth and simple. There's a chapter on the importance of staring. And just being. But he also mentions Taoism, which led me to the yin and yang and the balance of all things. Like 'Atom Heart Mother', in fact. The balance of opposites."

So are you the yin or the yang?

"Both," he says. "Because I can *see*."

At which point Frankie reappears with a bulging Sainsbury's bag, overflowing with Bramley apples. And there are further delights to come – in 2023, Trunk are releasing Ron Geesin's soundtrack to Stephen Weeks' unconventional 1974 horror film, 'Ghost Story'. And the man himself continues to work on fresh material.

The Geesins wave as I clamber into the car, and I thank them both profusely, with a passing thought to the vital contribution of one Paul Wardrope, who may have never known the enduring effect of his timely intervention in a criminally uncelebrated Glaswegian lavatory.

'Sunday Bloody Sunday' is out now on Trunk

KLAUS
ENCOUNTER

Co-founder of The Moonlandingz, Eccentronic Research Council and International Teachers Of Pop, Sheffield's prolific producer and "cultural agitator" Adrian Flanagan is back with a new album under his latest alias, Acid Klaus

WORDS: BEN WILLMOTT

In one of his excellent Reith Lectures, Turner Prize-winning "transvestite potter" Grayson Perry introduced us to the Helsinki Bus Station Theory. Conceived by the Finnish-American photographer Arno Minkkinen, it states that creative artists leaving art school head off on one of around 30 career paths, not unlike the similar amount of routes available from Helsinki's central bus station.

Too many, having received a less than enthusiastic reception – a bad review or a rude rejection – get off after a handful of stops, retrace their steps or hire a taxi and head back to the bus station to choose another route, only to repeat the whole process time and time again. But the real secret of success is simple. As Perry puts it, "Stay on the effing bus!".

A young Adrian Flanagan – aka Acid Klaus – was given a version of the very same advice by the late Fall frontman Mark E Smith. Growing up in the Prestwich area of Salford in the early 1980s proved to be incredibly fortuitous for the teenage Flanagan, who was already dipping his toe into the world of experimental electronic pop music as a guitarist and synth player. Among his neighbours and "people you would see around" were not only Smith, but John Cooper Clarke and Nico.

One day, round at Mark E Smith's house, he launched into a diatribe against some hyped act on the radio, insisting that he deserved the publicity they were getting. Smith retorted that although Flanagan certainly hadn't put in the hours to deserve it yet, there was a simple solution at hand.

"Just keep doing it."

Since then, that's pretty much what Flanagan has done. He even joined The Fall for a brief stint in the late 1990s.

"You stick with me. You're not like the other lot – they're musicians, you're an artist," Smith told him at the time.

"Very flattering," says Flanagan, although he was well aware of Smith's infamous "divide and rule" approach to the band.

Flanagan moved east across the Pennines to Sheffield just before the turn of the millennium, initially to escape the legions of Oasis impersonators, only to discover on his first trip to a rehearsal studio that the situation was no better in the Steel City.

"When I first came here, it was full of depressed disco dancers with nowhere to go and nothing to do," he laughs. "It was really fucking grim. But I guess it's that age-old thing – when it's pissing down all the time and it's miserable out, people tend to make music or create in some way."

As well as doing a lot of acid ("It made everything more beautiful and wonky"), Flanagan started forging alliances and building a dazzling array of different projects, most of which continue to this day. He hooked up with Dean Honer (I Monster/The All Seeing I) and they formed The Eccentronic Research Council with Maxine Peake, after bumping into her in a rehearsal room.

Since then, he has been associated with a panoply of different musical adventures, from the relatively obscure Two Inch Mouth and The Chanteuse And The Crippled Claw, to borderline household names like The Moonlandingz and International Teachers Of Pop. Working alone, Flanagan says, holds no appeal whatsoever – it's all about collaboration.

Which might seem odd, given that I'm meeting him on his home turf in Sheffield, to discuss what is essentially his debut solo album – 'Step On My Travelator: The Imagined Career Trajectory Of Superstar DJ & Dance Pop Producer Melvin Harris' – under yet another alias, Acid Klaus.

Wearing his trademark bucket hat and raincoat, it's not difficult to spot him at the train station. He's not unlike the character in the video for the album's first single, 'Party Sized Away Day', who's seen striding purposefully through the mustard-painted walkways of the sprawling Hyde Park estate that towers above the central part of the city. Although he snorts with derision at the suggestion he has an instantly recognisable image.

"Image? What, a bloke in a hat?"

A brisk walk through the city centre leads us past the now boarded-up Boardwalk – the venue where Alex Turner of Arctic Monkeys once worked as a barman and which, in its previous incarnation as the Black Swan (or the Mucky Duck, if you prefer the locals' nickname), hosted the first-ever concert by The Clash. Luckily, our ultimate destination remains very much open for business. The Shakespeare offers a friendly welcome, homemade sausage rolls and decently-priced craft beer.

"More folk up from London to talk to me," smiles Flanagan to the woman behind the bar, raising his eyebrows in mock nonchalance as we head outside to the beer garden.

As time passes, and pints are slowly but surely sunk, Flanagan proves to be candid company. He's ultra-confident and ready with a comeback when having his leg pulled.

But he's also self-critical, playing down his talent and bemoaning the huge administrative effort that being in charge of a band – let alone several – can be. With live music being the surest route to some kind of financial recompense for all this toil these days, he admits Covid and lockdown took a serious toll.

A nationwide tour for International Teachers Of Pop, Flanagan and Honer's disco-ish electropop project, was planned for 2020 to capitalise on their critically lauded second album 'Pop Gossip', but ended up being postponed three times.

Similarly, The Moonlandingz – which saw the pair hooking up with Fat White Family's Lias Kaci Saoudi and Saul Adamczewski, and Mairead O'Connor of Working Men's Club – had to call a halt to a snowballing live career that had already seen them clocking up something in the region of 70 gigs in a relatively short period of time. But in the complex, contradictory world of the man beneath the bucket hat, it was a blessing in disguise.

By this point, Flanagan had very much followed Mark E Smith's advice and kept doing what he'd been doing for years. Yet the ongoing strain of this, coupled with his beloved grandmother's lengthy illness and eventual death knocked him for six, and he started behaving badly towards his closest friends and audiences.

"I just wanted someone to punch me in the face, to distract me from the pain I was feeling inside," he reflects.

But then the pandemic brought everything to a halt.

"In many ways, lockdown saved me," he admits.

It offered him a chance to grieve for his grandmother properly, de-stress and – even if it meant financial hardship – stop all his organising. Naturally, he turned back to the studio and started creating.

"What else could I do?" he asks.

Flanagan laughs at the deliberately lengthy title of 'Step On My Travelator: The Imagined Career Trajectory Of Superstar DJ & Dance Pop Producer Melvin Harris'.

"I like long titles because it's funny, the thought of people going into a record shop and having to ask for all that," he grins.

Although Flanagan couldn't get into the studio to work with others in person, he was at least able to reach out to singers he could potentially collaborate with.

"Maria Uzor was the first person I approached, even before I'd considered doing an album," he recalls. "I was a fan of her band Sink Ya Teeth and loved a track she did with my friends A Certain Ratio, so it was nice that she agreed to do some tracks with me. She's got a real cool futuristic ESG-doing-minimal-electronica vibe, which I love."

'Party Sized Away Day', which effectively opens the album after the 'Step On My Travelator' intro, is an infectious fusion of electro, house and Uzor's distinctively soulful vocal, with a vocoded Flanagan paying tribute to Cybotron's groundbreaking 1983 cut, 'Clear'. Exactly the kind of dancefloor hypnotism that typified the classic early output from the once Sheffield-based Warp label. Was there a reference to the city's electronic lineage in the record's soundscape?

"Not specifically Sheffield, but I wanted a nod to a timeline of electronic music to run through the album," he says, before setting off on a roll call of other influences. "Juan Atkins is a major dude, and the genes of artists like A Guy Called Gerald, Throbbing Gristle, Patrick Cowley, The KLF, Add N To (X), Bruce Haack and Delia Derbyshire are all over it. All the pioneers with ASBOs of the past 50 years of electronic music – they're my people!"

With producer Ross Orton – who so brilliantly twiddled the knobs on Working Men's Club's recent album – also lending a hand on 'Party Sized Away Day', a concept started to form in Flanagan's head. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the

meltdown he'd suffered not long before, he began to construct a meditation on fame and success as seen through the eyes of imaginary superstar DJ, Melvin Harris.

"Once you've got a concept, the whole thing becomes a lot easier," he reasons. "I thought back to my own early years as a politically engaged teen, jumping on coaches with mates to random fields in north Wales or some empty warehouse in Lancashire at the weekend, with the DJs having guest singers doing live PAs over some electronic beat thing.

"A mate suggested Cat Rin – she's a new Welsh language artist based in south London, and I was knocked out by her solo stuff. I got the track title, 'Bethlehem Or Bust', from a newspaper article I saw at Tel Aviv airport just before the first lockdown. Politically, it resonated with me, so I asked Catrin to write something in Welsh about the English going into her country – stealing their land, decimating their language, history and culture – but all sung in Welsh.

"I love the idea of stupid English people going, 'This is a reet banger', while someone's singing in a language you don't understand about how much they hate what your countrymen have been doing to them for centuries! It's got a bit of an Add N To (X) feel, too."

'Blow Your Speakers' features Bianca Eddleston (aka Soft Focus), who Flanagan found via Instagram when International Teachers Of Pop were looking for artists to support them on tour.

"Musically and vocally, her stuff has a real classic 70s pop vibe, mixed in with early 'Jellybean'-produced Madonna," says Flanagan. "So when I'd written this tune that is meant to be Melvin's big crossover hit, it was a no-brainer to collaborate with Bianca on it. I love pop music, me!"

Then things start to get a little darker. 'Crashing Cars In Ibiza', voiced by Maria Uzor, finds Melvin as a sought-after DJ indulging in the nightlife culture of Ibiza.

"The title made me think of Bez, you know, crashing cars in Jamaica," laughs Flanagan. "He embodies someone who has really given himself up to the night so we don't have to."

'Bad Club Bad Drugs Bad People' continues the shadowy tone, as our hero begins to encounter a gangland tsar character – a sinister yet dapper gentleman who runs the clubs and the flow of drugs, and who likes hanging out with celebrity DJs, musicians and supermodels.

"You meet these types of people a lot when you're on the road," says Flanagan. "Flash, generous with cash but not to be fucked with – my kind of people! [laughs] Musically, I went a bit Throbbing Gristle on this one. It had to be hard and nightmarish."

Vocals on 'Elevate' are provided by Charlotte Kemp Muhl, who previously directed some of The Moonlandingz' videos over in Sheffield. Flanagan had also stayed at her New York home when he and Dean Honer mixed The Moonlandingz album over there with her partner, Sean Lennon. Lieselot Elzinga of Amsterdam-based Baby's Berserk, meanwhile, guests on 'The Three Rooms Of Nightclub Marilyn', effectively a long dark night of the soul for our hero.

"It's the central piece, where Melvin's having some kind of no-sleep, jet-lagged, drug psychosis episode," Flanagan expounds. "He's walking around a club after DJing there, and in every room he's hearing a different version of his own song. That's why it starts with the party version of the track, goes into the hip hop room and finishes in the dub/chill-out room."

Flanagan fires up the vocoder again for 'I Used To Be A DJ In A Club (But Now I'm Just A DJ In My Bedroom)', a cheeky dig at all those DJs and musicians subsidising their loss of income during lockdown with YouTube gigs. Hannah Hu lends what he describes as a "genuine British Karen Carpenter-esque tone" to 'My Hats On Fire', which marks the DJ's final retreat from the superstar life, with an almost country-ish ballad shaped by Richard Hawley's lap steel guitar.

Finally, 'Step On My Travelator' ends with Maxine Peake reading 'Eulogy To A Quiet Life', a moving narrative piece penned by Flanagan about how Melvin is reconciled to a calmer existence. For Melvin – in this case, anyway – read Flanagan.

"When I put this all together, I truly was thinking of jacking it all in," he admits.

Despite his apparent weariness with certain aspects of the industry, Adrian Flanagan is not exiting the bus quite yet. A slowdown of sorts is on the cards, but then so is a new Eccentronic Research Council album about Nine O'Clock Service – the alternative Sheffield Christian collective of the late 80s, dubbed the "acid house church" by the tabloids.

"I've always got four or five projects on the go," he laughs. "People can't keep up. But where does a madman put all that madness when he has nowhere to offload it creatively? It doesn't bear thinking about, really!"

'Step On My Travelator: The Imagined Career Trajectory Of Superstar DJ & Dance Pop Producer Melvin Harris' is out now on Zen FC

ART OF THE MATTER

Following 2018's acclaimed 'Psychic Data', TVAM's Joe Oxley has reappeared with a second long-player, 'High Art Lite', all cranked-up synth distortion, shoegazey euphoria and white-hot noise. Get ready for a vertiginous wall of sound

WORDS: FAT ROLAND

One day, in roughly 7.6 billion years' time, the Earth will slip from its orbit and plunge into the burning heart of the sun. For those of you misanthropic enough to welcome this oncoming Armageddon, I have good news. Listening to TVAM's fierce and fiery new long-player, 'High Art Lite', feels like a dress rehearsal for this unavoidable solar apocalypse.

The album is surf garage in a furnace. A synth orgy in a barbecue pit. A blistering barrage of fervent guitars and guttural synths, washed in plastic luminosity like a nuclear spill at Wigan Pier.

"It's certainly louder," says TVAM's scorcher-in-chief, Joe Oxley. "The record company said this was the loudest thing they'd put out. I'm happy with that."

'High Art Lite' is TVAM's follow-up to 2018's 'Psychic Data'. The first album's dreamy psychedelia prompted comparisons to Suicide and Boards Of Canada. The new work follows the same aesthetic, with woozy vocals wavering over distorted electro. However, this second long-player is more visceral. The shoegaze of the first has become a seething glare.

Take its glorious introduction, 'Future Flesh'. An extended organ shimmer bursts into a beat-heavy explosion of sound, complete with giddy helicopter bass and searing guitar lines. It's like strolling along the beach and watching the entire sea catch fire.

"The whole start meshes together," says Oxley. "You go through this sub-Elton John zone, then the curtain rises and the entire band's revealed. There was a time I thought this was the closing track because of the scale of it."

And the choice of organ?

"It's me trying to do the Inspiral Carpets!"

He swears by his Philicorda electronic organ, no doubt a staple instrument for psychedelic hippies and trippy vicars everywhere. Although don't ask him for an organ solo, because he doesn't consider himself a virtuoso on the keys. Far from it.

"I'm not the deftest of players," he shrugs. "I'm very much a MIDI-to-CV kind of guy. When it comes to playing, I let the computers do the work."

From the opening explosion, with every cobweb dutifully singed from your earholes, there's largely no let-up on 'High Art Lite'. Largely. That adverb will need explanation later in this article.

'Every Day In Every Way' leads with a staccato riff and the chompy energy of Pac-Man eating all the pellets at once. The single, 'Double Lucifer', matches corroded rust-drums with spiralling waveforms and a hurricane guitar line.

I want to talk about the sheer power overload of the production, but Oxley points me towards something more esoteric instead – English novelist JG Ballard, whose books have given us some of the most vivid moments in literary history. Think of the wartime scavenging of 'Empire Of The Sun', the tower-block violence of 'High-Rise', people getting horny in Ford Fiestas in 'Crash'.

More specifically, the scuffed and sun-drenched 'Piz Buin' is Oxley's tribute to Ballard's 1996 novel 'Cocaine Nights', which follows the dodgy goings-on in an exclusive Spanish resort. The 'Piz Buin' video is a kaleidoscopic collage of tropical holidays and utopian home robotics. Imagine a Thomas Cook travel agent in 'Blade Runner' Los Angeles. "Escape life for a little while," say the lyrics while referencing sunburn, heart attacks and being generally annoyed with other people on vacation. Utopia burned with streaks of dystopia.

"I was using such bright sounds, with sunshine coming out of them," he says. "The book and the track are about ultimate wealth and things that go on in a boxed-off enclave."

For legal reasons, we must point out that the title of that piece is absolutely not a satirical take on the sun-care brand, Piz Buin. No sir, not at all.

"To sidestep any confusion, Piz Buin is actually a mountain range in the Alps," says Oxley with knowing emphasis. "Some people have, er, told me that it's also a common feature of holidays in the sunshine."

We'll leave it there, Joe.

JG Ballard is not the only bookish reference Oxley drops into the interview. He also namechecks US postmodern novelist Don DeLillo, whose consumer control phrase "psychic data" gave him the title of TVAM's first album. These references are no surprise because Joe Oxley has a hidden past – he's spent a whole bunch of his adult life working in public libraries.

"My wife always tells me I'm a really slow reader," he says. "I feel like I should be more literary than I am. But what working in libraries allowed me to do was dabble a bit more than I perhaps would have, had I not been in that environment. I enjoy exploring ideas through reading."

Having self-produced 'Psychic Data', a big change on 'High Art Life' was having Invada Records come on board. The label, of course, was co-founded by Geoff Barrow, of Portishead/Beak fame.

"We got the chance to play with Beak in Paris, and they showed an interest in us as a band," says Oxley. "The most important thing for any artist thinking of joining a label is to ask yourself if you can see yourself on it. I definitely could have seen the first album coming out on Invada."

On his Facebook page, Oxley thanks mixer James Trevascus and masterer Grant Berry for "sacrificing their ears so you can play it loud". He's not wrong. The way he describes Berry's mastering technique, I imagine the process behind the mixing desk went as follows. Step One – ask Berry to embellish something that perhaps sounds a little distorted. Step Two – watch him respond by cranking the faders through the roof until the windows shatter. Animal from 'The Muppet Show' with twiddly knobs instead of drums.

When it comes to James Trevascus, Oxley appears in awe. Trevascus, it seems, added oomph that would have been impossible on a solo-produced record.

"Had it not been touched by James, it would have been purely uncomfortable, rather than uncomfortable and enjoyable!"

We chat in detail about specific sounds. He talks about Trevascus making the hi-hats grate, reaching frequencies Oxley felt he was unable to hear, and about bass being something that "surrounds and envelops you, and keeps you in a space". He recalls early TVAM gigs held in deliberately small rooms to make sure that space was as up-close and personal as possible.

All this is plain to hear. Just listen to the corrugation of the cymbals on 'Say Anything'. When I praise the rustiness of his sounds, Oxley lights up.

"I'm less interested in the pristine," he says. "Distortion and degraded sounds can work harmoniously. If you start to distort things, the whole thing sloshes and everything pulses at the same time. It's like a texture."

Using all of the frequencies all of the time – a wall of sound for a generation that doesn't remember Wall of Sound.

"There's space there, so why not use it?" adds Oxley.

Earlier, I said the album "largely" didn't let up. In fact, it does let up. As well as what he calls his "Michael Mann LA" instrumental, 'Shallow Ends', at the end of Side One, there are two 'Club Nautico' interludes. Named after the nightspot in Ballard's 'Cocaine Nights', whose manager is accused of murder, they provide welcome gasps of air in the record's fiery sea.

'Club Nautico (Part 1)' has lapping waves and chirruping birds while an electro track plays merrily in the distance, as if it's on a bar stereo at the side of a swimming pool. This diegetic tune was originally meant to be a main track, but it was too pop for Oxley's taste. Later, it all muffles as we plunge underwater. This is his deliberate metaphor for how overwhelming he wanted the album to feel. Everything loops back around on 'Club Nautico (Part 2)', where we resurface with a big splash. And breathe. The effect has a curiously personal inspiration.

"I'm not religious, and my dad isn't now, but he was baptised by total immersion," says Oxley. "The phrase 'total immersion' stuck with me. That aspect of leaving one's sense of self. I can't get away from the fact it's an album that's aware of itself."

On that divine note, I wonder if there's any religious inspiration behind the excoriating Nine-Inch-Nailed single 'Double Lucifer'? An uncle who joined the Satanists, perhaps? An aunt who stole biscuits at church coffee mornings?

"It's just a snappy title, mate," he shrugs. "It made me laugh because it sounded like a wrestling move."

The release has been partnered with lyric videos – Super 8 nostalgic video collages emblazoned with words in massive sans-serif capitals. Like being pelted over and again by the Hollywood sign. The vocals are so washed-out that having this captioned clarity seems like a rare treat.

"TAKE OFF AND NEVER COME BACK," shout the words on title track 'High Art Lite'. On 'Semantics', we read the pithy rhyming couplet, "WE'LL ENTER INTO PARTNERSHIP / OF NOUGHTS AND ONES AND MICROCHIPS". This video text effect was used on the first album's release, but everything seems ramped up this time. With the words so large, it's a surprise to find Oxley's attitude to lyrics so, well, small.

"There's a bit of me that wants to wipe my voice out," he says. "It's another texture, not necessarily the focus of the track."

His shyness certainly adds to his charm, and we laugh awkwardly when we get too deep.

"There's a part of you that's really proud and a part of you that's full of shame," he says. With a smile.

We're meeting at Oxley's home in Wigan, an occasion that includes polite interruptions from his cat and his son. The room is full of nods to the past. There are shelves of board games, including Buckeroo! and Pictionary. And there's a proper old-school stereo with racks of albums. Records on display include Grand Prix's 'Mach 1' and Takeshi Terauchi's 'Nippon Guitars (Instrumental Surf, Eleki & Tsugaru Rock 1966-1974)'.

There's even a sunburst clock – a home furnishing I've not seen since I interviewed Molly Half Head in the early 1990s. All of which reminds me that nostalgia plays a significant role in TVAM's aesthetic.

"In the first couple of years of TVAM, the visual aspect was about exploring when I was six or seven years old, about the age my son is now," explains Oxley. "It's dated, but the moment you introduce other aspects like text, it begins to feel like something discarded that's been found again."

The nostalgia informs the music more directly than you would think, especially in the choice of synthesisers. All the synths used in Oxley's records were made between 1977 and 1989. Or thereabouts.

"I appreciate that's a pretty big span of time," he says.

He praises the joysticked Enya favourite, the Roland D-50 – a synth that soundtracked television during his childhood. He likes the ARP Quartet and Korg M1 for strings and the Roland SH-2 for basslines.

And he remembers buying his first synth, a Korg MS-10, because he was really into two particular bands – London electronic outfit Add N To (X) and a very recognisable bunch of plastic-domed brothers from Ohio.

"When I was younger, I wasn't a fan of British synthesiser music. I'm more into characters like Devo and their interplay of punk and electronics. That's why I got interested in Add N To (X). They're not just a synth band – it's the guitars too. At the time, I was playing in a band that did Devo surf music, sort of like Man Or Astro-Man?. I still like that combination of guitars and electronics."

There are other nods to the 1990s, with the title inspired by the Brit Art movement. Oxley mentions no names, but sharks in formaldehyde come to mind, as do messy beds and other Cool Britannia things that made The KLF burn £1 million of their own money in frustration.

"It's specifically about the presence of money within the art world," says Oxley. "The cynical edge-lordliness of it. Art that thinks it speaks for something but speaks for nothing."

It's not long before we chat about that staple of millennium American indie, The Dandy Warhols. Two tracks later on in the album, 'Say Anything' and 'Host', feature traces of the Vodafone-plugging power pop pedlars.

"I love The Dandy Warhols for that ear for melody and harmony," admits Oxley. "I like the idea of melodies being as primitive as possible. I'll side with three chords over being virtuoso any time."

So fiery it feels like falling "into the burning heart of the sun" is probably not the best advert for TVAM's 'High Art Lite'. Apologies for that. At least we can soundtrack that advert with some retro synths.

Joe Oxley's next job is to take all this brash brightness and foist it on an unsuspecting public. He'll perform alongside Jason Hughes, his long-time "wingman", on keyboards, and drummer Liam Stewart, who first played with TVAM at Cardiff Psych & Noise Fest a few short months ago.

"The three-piece has been more powerful than I thought it was going to be," says Oxley. "I've really missed getting out there and doing shows. I'm even looking forward to the boring moments between soundchecks."

'High Art Lite' ends with the climactic chorus of the title track. The vocals soar. The drums splash. An acid bass frolics lightly over it all. 'A Storm In Heaven'-era Verve on poppers. Man Or Astro-Man? after too many strawberry laces. It's an exhilarating end to a shiny and luminous album. The lyrics? Let's write them in capitals. "IF DREAMS CAN BE BOUGHT / THEN THIS WHOLE THING FALLS APART." TVAM's 'High Art Lite' is, of course, on sale now.

'High Art Lite' is out now on Invada

ORIGINAL THINKERS

LEFTFIELD

This Is What We Do

VIRGIN

Back in 2005 at the Live 8 concert in Hyde Park, Michael Stipe from REM introduced the band's set with the perfunctory statement, "We're REM, and this is what we do". Don't worry, this isn't a review about REM, but I found myself thinking about Stipe's words when listening to 'This Is What We Do'. What exactly is it that Leftfield do? Given this is only their fourth album since Neil Barnes adopted the alias in 1989, even accounting for the eight-year hiatus that began in 2002 with the departure of Paul Daley, the answer to that question certainly isn't that they release a lot of music.

Leftfield – now led solely by Barnes – have rarely stayed with one style for long, and stylistically, 'This Is What We Do' once again jumps around all over the place. It's not a compilation because everything here is original, but the way its 11 tracks weave through the various iterations of electronic dance music that have interested Barnes since the late 1980s makes it feel rather like a reboot – the same inspirations, the same story, but powerfully and expertly updated. Having embraced music technology and cutting-edge production pretty much from the off, you'd expect nothing less.

The title track finds him exploring the deep electro beats that have popped up across Leftfield's history, here hitched to low-slung bass and hip hop vocal samples. If it feels like a throwback, that's because it absolutely is, but there's something about the resolute, direct approach that seems perfectly suited to today's world as it slowly falls off its axis. Elsewhere, 'Making A Difference' flirts with a garagey framework of wild bass and rave-friendly sirens, the breezy 'Heart And Soul' wears its Algerian influences on its sleeve, and there's a nod to melodic Detroit techno on the buoyant closer, 'The Power Of Listening'.

One of the best tracks here is 'Full Way Round', an urgent drum 'n' bass hybrid fronted by Fontaines DC vocalist Grian Chatten, channelling a dreamlike, visceral, nihilistic quality that falls somewhere between Iggy Pop's 'The Passenger' and Underworld's 'Born Slippy'. The key here, though, isn't the vocal per se – it's the wiry sound that threads its way through the track, almost like a pure, joyous and untameable electrical current. Arguably the least nuanced, most direct thread back to Barnes' roots comes in the form of 'Accumulator'. Here, you get a distinctive, unstoppable rolling bassline, insistent hand percussion, a sense of urgency, and build after thrilling build. Embellished with a bit of acid flutter, slightly wonky pitch-bent synths and flashes of vital, dangerous energy, 'Accumulator' is easily one of the best things Barnes has done since 'Release The Pressure'.

But 'This Is What We Do' isn't some sort of retro look back at the ghosts of Leftfield past. The album manages to be faithful to Barnes' legacy and simultaneously progressive. Two of the biggest departures come in the form of 'Machines Like Me' and 'City Of Synths', both of which nod reverentially in the direction of Kraftwerk. The former is a tender ode to machines – what else? – with a beautiful melody, a snatch of melodica and a shuffling microcosm of unplaceable, tiny sounds, like a love song for domestic appliances. In contrast, 'City Of Synths' is full of urgent energy, like it's actually careering through a metropolis of high-rise modular synths. Lurking beneath that enticing exterior is something that Barnes has always done exceptionally well, and that you hear time after time on 'This Is What We Do' – alluring, savagely direct beats that are as sharp as blades.

Leftfield's first single, 1990's 'Not Forgotten', earned them the genre description of "progressive house". It was a useful way of explaining that the track – a club-oriented cut framed with dubby sounds and African percussion – didn't really fit with the conventions of dance music. Progressive house was to house music what post-punk was to punk. It was looser, less shackled, and definitely harder to pigeonhole.

The tag is now more or less redundant, but it feels like confronting and challenging the strictures of the dancefloor is what motivates Barnes to continue defying genre classification. What he does, then, is just make Leftfield music – and that's always worth the wait.

MAT SMITH

LEFTFIELD
THIS IS WHAT WE DO

CIOZ
Supermassive Whole
STIL VOR TALENT

The debut album from Italian artist Alessandro Cozzolino fizzes with tickly techno. Actual sonic tickles. It follows 2020's truly dramatic 'Cosmic Silence' EP, and with constantly nudged cut-off filters, the delight is in the dynamics. The electro house standout 'Wachaka' sounds like Jon Hopkins with extra hop. On euphoric stomper 'Do It The Way You Feel', cheery vocals provide welcome variation. The analogue sensibility is supermassive too – these laser-focused tickles are powered by cathode rays. **FR**

THE OVERLOAD
The Overload
WOODFORD HALSE

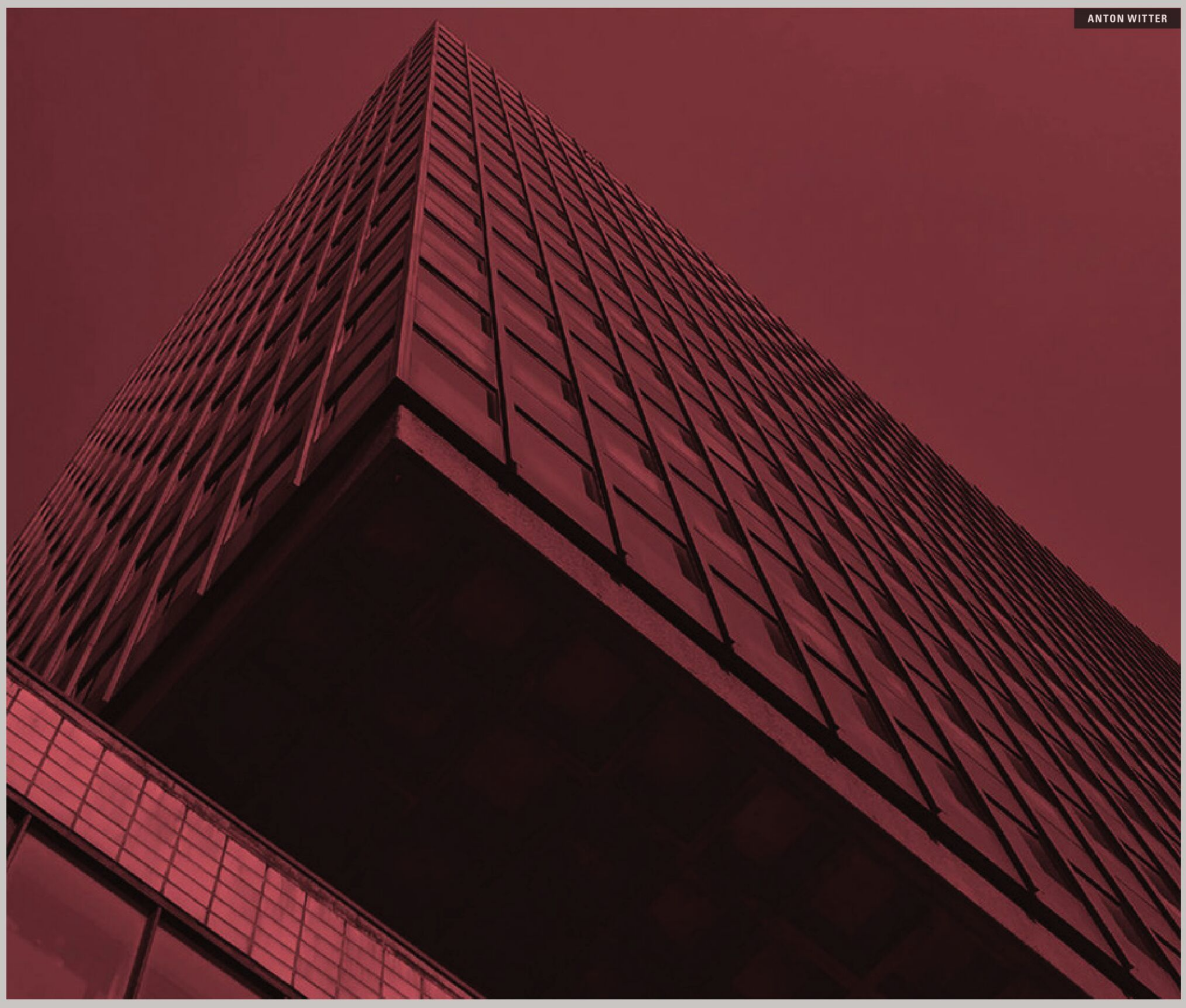
It's JG Ballard fronting Depeche Mode! Standing at the front of the 'Top Of The Pops' stage, looking bemused in a corduroy blazer. Mat "Pulselovers" Handley and Allan "Midwich Youth Club" Murphy combine their considerable powers on this 2016 digital-only release, now spruced up for cassette. Opening track 'Gated Community' sets the tone – a splendidly utilitarian synth workout, with Kraftwerk flicking the Vs through the perimeter fence. And with 'Concrete Island' only missing a tortured David Sylvian vocal, it's an engaging album that seamlessly combines kosmische nods with old-school pop perfection. **BF**

AYLU
Profondo Rosa
MANA

Yet another immaculate album from London's Mana label, this time from Argentinian producer Aylu (aka Ailin Grad). An erudite sound experimentalist, here she packages up bewildering but beguiling miniature sound worlds. Served with generous helpings of fun, cuts such as 'Cremisi' and 'Arancione' showcase Grad's hyperreal and playful compositions, while more abstract pieces like the spatial 'Giallo' are thoroughly absorbing. A highly charming and attention-grabbing collection. **FH**

404 GUILD
False Dawn
DIRTY HIT

This debut from the young South London collective reframes fragments of trap, trip hop and grime, whilst somehow also defying neat categorisation. Clear highlights are the propulsive, intensely infectious 'Feedback Loop' and the soaring, spoken word groove of 'New Health'. Despite deliciously nostalgic echoes of Massive Attack, Tricky and Ghostpoet, 404 Guild have created a sound which is very much their own. 'False Dawn' captures the darkness and subsequent hope of the past few years in a truly innovative, thoughtful and dynamic fashion. **CC**



ANTON WITTER
Notes From A Dreamstate
BANDCAMP

The "romanticism of travel and the mystery of dreams" are the influences York-based Witter claims for this affecting collection of somnambulant synth instrumentals. He's clearly fallen asleep listening to Jean-Michel Jarre on the bus home, because this is a pristine evocation of the days when languid, prog-tinged melodies arrived as frequently as homework. "The things I see around me, are they truly real?" he ponders, in a spoken interlude on 'Intermission 1# (Dream Within A Dream)'. An album that envelops like the finest Egyptian cotton. **BF**

FLIGHT CODA
A Window At Night The 27th
WARM WINTERS LTD

Sheffield's Jonathan George Fox (aka Sentry, Power Therapy, Foundling) takes on the Flight Coda moniker for this exploration of dream-state sonics via four long-form tracks. Drawn from Fox's extensive archive, he's instinctively selected pieces that hold a "special warmth". The resulting work has echoes of both David Sylvian's early ambient output and Biosphere's later work, with the title track and 'Help Void' standing out for their rolling textural shifts. An immensely beautiful and ornate collection that leaves you wondering what further treasures that archive contains. **MJ**

MARLOWE
Marlowe 3
MELLO MUSIC

Back in 2020, Marlowe's 'Future Power Sources' burst out of televisions during, of all things, a Gatorade advert. But commercialism aside, the American duo (rapper Solemn Brigham and producer Austin Hart, aka L'Orange) possess a fresh and hooky attitude to hip hop. On this, their third instalment, the production is as unique as the lyrical footwork is tight. Don't sleep on the Morricone-isms of 'My People', the fresh take on minimalism that underscores 'Light Trip', or the left-field psychedelia of 'Clarity'. **JS**

CHILDESE
Minor Eden
NOT NOT FUN

The sleeve notes for 'Minor Eden' describe its creator, Childese – aka St Petersburg musician Vova Kolbin – as a "keyboard fantasist". That's pretty much nail on head. On 'Libericke 1990' and 'Adamov Effect', Kolbin conjures hypnagogic landscapes from droning organ and twinkling electronics, glazed with the sort of fuzzy shimmer that's become synonymous with Britt Brown's excellent Not Not Fun label. Exquisitely meditative, these fantastical, half-remembered dreams might be minor in title, but they provide major enjoyment. **ST**

TRISTAN - PHOTO: TOBI JOHNSON

TRISTAN

Wellif

PIAS

Tristan is the alter ego of producer Isolde Van Den Bulcke, a Belgian chanteuse who has been called the Flemish Melanie De Biasio, though that neat narrative crumbles under proper scrutiny. Drawing on a wide vocal range, Van Den Bulcke's rich alto elicits a sonorous sombreness, while her music occasionally skirts the edges of jazztronica. The opener 'Ian Des' is briefly reminiscent of Steve Reich, before Tristan's soaring voice helps it disappear beyond the jazz-pop looking glass. A sensual, surreal wonderland of a debut. **JA**

THE DARK JAZZ PROJECT

The Dark Jazz Project

IRREGULAR PATTERNS

This is a new alias for Birmingham musician Andrew Spackman, but one that retains the same sonic instability of his previous pseudonym, Sad Man. His ethos here is to create something "angry, complex and challenging", and tracks like the housey 'Ahoy' have more bite than a cage of hungry wildcats. With the noisy, distortion-heavy highlight 'No Input', jazz samples are skewed into urgent, aggressive and unrecognisable shapes. A haunting unadorned sax occasionally pokes through, only to be sucked back down into Spackman's beautifully antagonistic maelstrom of sound. Excellent. **MS**

OMEGA INSTITUTE

Continuum

PRESTON CAPES

Space is the place for free jazz/electronica trio Omega Institute – Nigel Bryant (oscillations/FX), Carl Cottrell (bass) and Aidan Searle (drums) – who continue their stellar work with this second album of improvised underground sounds, honed and crafted at Bristol's renowned Sounds On The Corner sessions. It's a hugely engaging barrage of cosmic sci-fi pulses, explosive retro-futuristic bleeps and intensely hypnotic percussion all the way, particularly on the mesmeric 'Haptic Glide'. More power to their collective elbows. Truly outstanding. **CG**

SUSANA SANTOS SILVA

All The Birds And A Telephone Ringing

THANATOSIS

Where many musicians use field recordings to add background texture to their compositions, Portuguese trumpeter Susana Santos Silva is unique in that she brings them to the forefront. Her instrument is barely audible over the creaking ship hulls and cawing gulls on 'The Way Home'. 'As One Comes Closer To The World' sounds more like someone washing up than avant-garde jazz, and even when the trumpet lines are discernible they appear in hushed conversation with the sounds of the world around them. A beautiful and vivid excursion in electroacoustics. **PC**

SNOWDROPS
Missing Island
INJAZERO

Snowdrops – French multi-instrumental duo Christine Ott and Mathieu Gabry – return with their third album, a distinctive amalgam of electronics and piano, once again embellished by frequent collaborator Anne-Irène Kempf on viola. Her expressive, often dissonant playing gives 'Land Of Waves' an unsettled, questioning tone, framed by Ott's ondes Martenot and Gabry's ivory-tickling/synth flourishes. And an icy ephemerality settles upon 'Radioactive Breath', as a subdued keyboard refrain floats from a restless bed of white noise and static. Beguiling and beatific. **MS**

CORNTUTH
Letters To My Robot Son
FLOW STATE

Warm and fuzzy feelings abound on the third album by Brooklyn's Corntuth. The concept tugs at the heartstrings – "decades in the future, at the end of mankind, a father leaves a data tape for his robot son...a series of modules he thinks might make his robot son sentient". It's charmingly executed via the nostalgic, diaphanous tones of a 1985 Korg Poly-800 mkII and a 1983 Yamaha DX7, with tracks like 'E-001' and 'F-001' full of winsome notes and lovely shimmers and spirals. Just the thing to teach a machine to feel. **CF**

MAUSKOVIC DANCE BAND
Bukaroo Bank
BONGO JOE

This anarchic bunch of Amsterdam vibe-channellers really capture the spirit of the borderless multinational free rave on their second full-length release. Drawing on influences new and old – dub-inflected punk, Middle-Eastern funk, electro, Afrobeat – there's an energy to tracks like the irresistibly trippy 'Zwaar' and 'People In The Hall' that feels like an Adrian Sherwood-produced Cabaret Voltaire were joined in the studio by The Slits and LCD Soundsystem. Lee "Scratch" Perry – Mr 'Punky Reggae Party' himself – would've loved it. **CG**

MODUS PITCH
Polyism
ALTIN VILLAGE & MINE

Leipzig's Friedrich "Fritz" Brückner spent years playing in experimental bands like White Wine while working as a sound engineer and producer at the Haunted Haus studio in his home city. Often employed in the service of others, lockdown provided him with the time to finally create a debut album as Modus Pitch. 'Polyism' refers to the eclectic, energetic polyrhythms on tracks like 'Drive' and 'Suspender', though it's also a nod to the multifarious styles that coalesce so naturally here, from glitchy electronica and dub to squalls of free jazz. **JA**

SONAMB
Sleepstates
CONTROL DATA

The debut release from Manchester sound artist and Oram Award winner Vicky Clarke (aka Sonamb) takes the listener through the dream states that are a product of our interaction with analogue, algorithmic and digital technologies. Drawing on random frequency snatches ('Sleepstates'), disquieting textures ('Sync Whole') and skittering somnambulist pulses ('Hypnabyte'), the album skirts around the edges of lucid dreams that characterise REM sleep – shaped, manipulated and interrupted by what Clarke describes as the noise of "machine addiction". A stunning collection. **MJ**

DUVAL TIMOTHY
Meeting With A Judas Tree
CARRYING COLOUR

On his latest album, multidisciplinary artist Duval Timothy combines twinkling keys with field recordings from around the world. Whether that's thousands of scurrying termites in Sierra Leone, where he was born, or silver birches in London, where he was raised, together they form a deeply textured collage bursting with an array of listenable life. Buoyed by some impressive guest contributors, including composer/sound artist Yu Su and producer Lamin Fofana, this is another highly compelling diaristic album (following 2020's excellent 'Help') that speaks to the diasporic experience with true originality. **ILS**

ZAVOLOKA
Amulet
PROSTIR

Berlin-based musician Kateryna Zavoloka has made a number of challenging and vital albums since 2003. None more so than 'Amulet', however. Dedicated to a free Ukraine, 'Amulet' sees Zavoloka, who was born in Kyiv, processing traditional folk music instruments from her homeland, amid maelstroms of swarming noise and threatening drones. As a sonic representation of the war engulfing Ukraine, tracks like 'Mitsni' are uncompromisingly harsh and harrowing, but the flutes of 'Tsvit' end things on a peaceful note of tentative hope. **PC**

ROMÉO POIRIER
Living Room
FAITICHE

Released on Jan Jelinek's Faitiche label, French producer Roméo Poirier's third album finds him swimming through the immersive ambience of nostalgia. With slowly ebbing waves of sound, each creating an endlessly revealing palette, it's a beautiful follow-up to his superb 2020 long-player 'Hotel Nota'. Continually drawing on and resampling an archive of self-recorded loops, Poirier's gorgeously refracted sonic memories sit just beyond the reach of recognition, as if he's tinkering with the materiality of his past – most potently on standout tracks 'Porte Contre', 'Anna' and 'Muscle De Sable'. **MJ**

LISA BELLA DONNA
Hypnosis
BANDCAMP

It gets cold up there in Appalachia come October, so it's a fair bet that composer/modular synthesist Lisa Bella Donna went through plenty of firewood during the three-day mountain retreat that yielded these two lengthy tracks. At first, we're in hardcore 'Macbeth' territory, with a harsh wind whistling over 'Salem Mass'. But then LBD's crucible stretches out towards more Tangerine Dream-ish vibes, with a rush of beautiful analogue arpeggios and reverb-led swirls that burn down to the majestic finale of 'Necrophobia'. Hypnotic, indeed. **JS**

XAO
Wirehead
CANVAS

It's rare that an experimental electronica album makes you feel like Keanu Reeves, but listening to, Xao's third album 'Wirehead' is akin to Johnny Mnemonic getting his head overloaded with information. Packing in grime, contemporary classical, IDM and plenty else, 'Hyperfixate For Me' is glitch techno driven off a cliff, 'Ophanim Plushie' the smithereens from the resulting impact, and the forlorn 'Threnody For The Child Of Omelas' seems shrouded in a smoke that could very well be your brain cells burning. Heady stuff. **PC**

MAXIME DENUC
Nachthorn
VLEK

This is a quirky one. Using the MIDI-controlled pipe organ at St Antonius Church in Düsseldorf like a synthesiser, French composer Maxime Denuc has fashioned pieces of "acoustic dance music" that mirror dub techno, trance and harmonic grooves. Hugely mesmeric and ornate they are too, especially on the soaring, Steve Reich-esque murmuration of 'Infinite End', the fluttering oscillations of 'Papillons' and the exhilarating radiance of 'Fat Old Sun', during which you can almost feel warm rays of restorative sunshine beaming in around you. Immeasurably beautiful. **VI**

REPEATED VIEWING
Murdercoaster
SPUN OUT OF CONTROL

Beginning with a bloodcurdling scream and boasting tracks entitled 'Slot Machine Slaughter' and 'Love Canal Of Blood', Alan Sinclair has produced a giddy homage to the lurid video nasties of his youth, filled with bombastic synths spoofing hilariously wonky carnival organs. Yep, we're at the fairground – and the daffy drumbeats of 'Dodgems Of Death' are the highlight of this splendid nod to an era when trashy VHS releases often sparked a tabloid furore. If this was 1983, the Daily Mail would want it banned. **BF**

TERENCE FIXMER - PHOTO: KATJA RUGE

TERENCE FIXMER
Shifting Signals
MUTE

Terence Fixmer's Mute debut takes its cue from Ridley Scott's 'Alien', in which Sigourney Weaver looks for a cat on a spaceship. The techno is appropriately alienating. Scrunched club beats heavy with bass. LFO-wobbling sonic assaults. And on the ear-flattening, stomach-bursting 'Corne De Brume', synths toot desperately above rolling thuds like a xenomorph wading through an audio swamp. Quieter moments await later in the album, an airlock amid the space rage. Wonder if she ever found that cat? **FR**

ELIZABETH CROMPTON
Problems Of Other Minds
WERRA FOXMA

Manchester's Elizabeth Crompton serves up a truly stunning debut full of dextrous, emotive synth work, wistful piano lines and shivers-down-the-spine vocals. It's sheer quality from start to finish – 'Shelter' is a gripping, haunting opener, its subtle and spacious arrangement perfectly augmenting Crompton's ethereal voice, 'Last Breath' is a moody dance of electronics and heavenly intonations, and the title track is guaranteed to break even the toughest of hearts with its doleful keys and wavering analogue synth lines. First albums don't get much more gorgeous than this. **CF**

MANSUR BROWN
NAQI Mixtape
AMAI

Like all good mixtapes, Brixton man Mansur Brown's takes us through a range of sounds, styles and genres, with the source material being his own two 'NAQI' EPs. Showcasing slick production skills and virtuosic guitar playing, this is a melodic exploration of the multi-hued darkness before the dawn.'My Luck' and 'Me And You' draw on the isolationist atmospheres of Burial's earliest work, while 'Meikai' employs repeated vocal refrains before opening out onto a sunrise guitar meditation that echoes the Cocteau Twins at their best. **MJ**

KILLIAN WRIGHT
No Country For Old Men
CELLAR HOUSE

The young East Anglian composer Killian Wright is already making a name for himself with the inventive soundtracks he creates for well-known films. Here he tackles the Coen Brothers' 'No Country For Old Men', mixing industrial and symphonic textures to create something as gothic and shocking as the film itself. There's high tension throughout, with the echo-laden cellos and helicopter-like synths of 'Blood Trail', the primal, rhythmic build of 'Gunpowder' and the cataclysmic explosions of 'Showdown' all proving quite terrifying. Keep the lights on, would be our advice. **BW**

TUKAN
Atoll
MAGMA/NEWS

At first glance, TUKAN are a paradox. It's all electronics and no computers. The four-piece, rising from the ashes of Antwerp's Boucan and Boukan 2.0, combine the jazz and post-rock explorative verve of Tortoise ('Lagoon') with a Floating Points-style sheen ('Scuba'). It's a debut album that's as deceptive as it is propulsive, peaking with the headlong thrills of '206'. And then a curveball – the final track 'Black Pearl' features the downbeat rapping of SVDU and hints at a whole new direction. This feels like the start of something special. **AT**

UNT
Clips Of Perspective
ENMOSSED / PSYCHIC LIBERATION

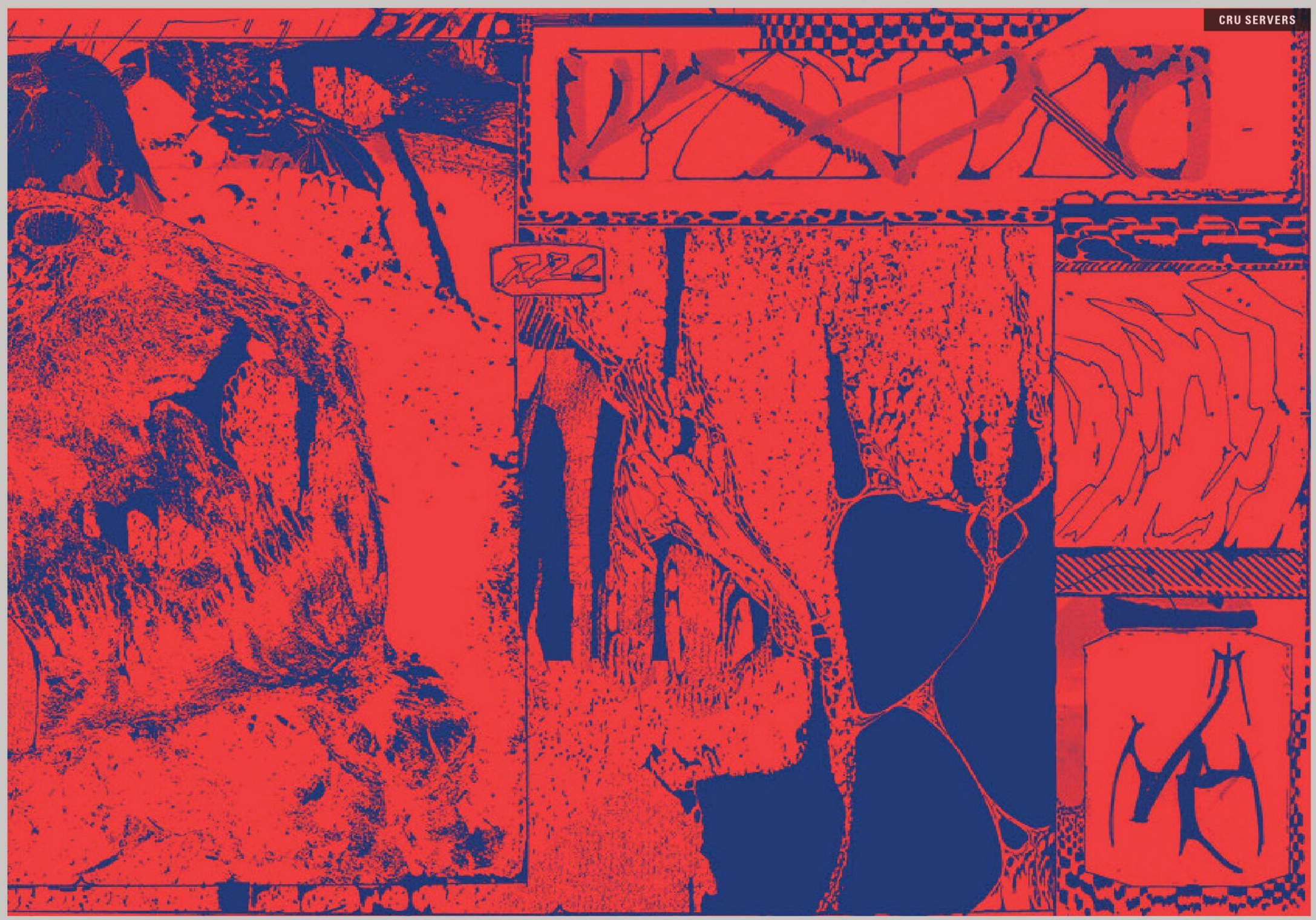
After a wicked dub encounter as NUG with Canadian producer PVAS, German producer Florian T M Zeisig continues to make waves, this time with Chicago drummer and musician John Daniel (aka Forest Management) under the alias Unt. 'Clips Of Perspective' is the first vinyl release in a collaborative series between Enmossed and Psychic Liberation, focusing on new global music, and tracks like 'Zlep' make the wax value clear – peak hybrid ambient, just enough dubby techno to get your backside off the sofa, and with hints of jazz and hip hop for colour. A zone-out masterpiece. **FH**

MINDER
Sanctuary
HYPERCOLOUR

The urban sub-genres of garage, jungle, breakbeat and grime have spent two decades keeping their distance from each other, so it's great to hear a new generation of younger producers sticking them all back into the same melting pot. UK producer Minder's second mixtape begins with 'Ard', sounding like a depressed version of The Streets, but the further down its lo-fi path we go – the manic junglist workout 'Coleshill', say, or the genuinely grimy hip hop of 'Manipulate' – the more interesting and deviant it gets. **BW**

MODE 7 PROJECT
Tokyo Greater Metropolitan Area
MOOLAKII CLUB AUDIO INTERFACE

This dreamy release on new Wirral-based label Moolakii Club Audio Interface brings together two companion EPs by Mode 7 Project, aka Manchester's Liam Moody. Taking inspiration from the likes of Eno and Manuel Göttsching, and written using traditional Japanese scaling systems, these ambient electronica compositions are both captivating and transcendent – the seven minutes of 'A Rainy Afternoon' glide by in a lovely haze of skittering bleeps, while the resonant mixture of synths and field recordings on 'Four Shrines' sings like the clearest of bells. Beautifully transportive. **CF**



CRU SERVERS
EEL

12TH ISLE

Finally, we can let out that breath we first started holding in 2017 – after a five-year absence, Cru Servers (Rickie and Jamie McNeill) are back from whatever far-flung celestial body the pair have been cruising on. Temporarily ensconced on Earth again, in their native Glasgow, the duo's 'EEL' album is released by the city's consistently excellent 12th Isle label.

Succinctly describing the Servers' style is as tough as interpreting their songwriting, but 'EEL' loosely follows the "jam of strange samples and unstable rhythms" found on 2017's debut album, 'Blubber Tottum'. While a listen to the lighthearted, glimmery plucks of 'Sacramental Lettuce' grants a glimpse of the experimental mettle on 'EEL', the only solution is to jump right into their "lube-pool" and get ensconced in the likes of 'In Luted Plaque Water', which properly struts to the electronic funk like no one else around.

'EEL' even comes with a bonus heritage seven-inch by CCV – featuring two tracks recorded by Cru Servers' dad, Jonzip McNeill, in 1986 – which is just as delectably weird. Gold standard, the lot of it. **FH**

MARTIN REV
Les Nymphes

BUREAU B

As the primitive drum machine kicks in on 'Sophie Eagle' – this brilliant album's opening track – we're transported directly to the thrills that abounded on Suicide's eponymous, ahead-of-its-time 1977 LP. Martin Rev and Alan Vega's pioneering influence cannot be overstated, and yet 'Les Nymphes' is anything but nostalgic.

Originally released in 2008 and criminally overlooked, Rev's distinctive compositional abilities remain fully intact here, right from that spiralling, irresistibly propulsive opener.

Taking inspiration from ancient Greek mythology and pulling in several strands of clubby deep house and early techno (check 'Phaetone' in particular for a revitalising dose of the underground), there's a dream-like, often ethereal quality to tracks like 'Dragonfly' and 'Venise'. And Rev's uncanny ability to cull from unlikely left-field sources is also writ large on the moody, doom metal-flecked 'Triton'. Very impressive. **CG**

VARIOUS ARTISTS
Music For New Romantics

CHERRY RED

This killer compilation is another vivid reminder of the flamboyant New Romantic counterculture, as it goes back to the early 1980s to plunder the zeitgeisty playlists of hip after-dark hotspots such as The Blitz and Wag Club in London, Manchester's Pips and Birmingham's Rum Runner. You can almost smell the Gitanes.

Put together by Wag Club/Blue Rondo À La Turk founder Chris Sullivan, 'Music For New Romantics' is a real melting pot, recalling a time when all manner of stylish posers, extroverts and "junk shop fashionistas" would artfully strut their stuff to an eclectic assortment of glam rock (Bowie, Roxy), new wave (The Cure, Siouxsie) and future-facing electropop (The Human League, Yello, John Foxx), all represented here. You couldn't fail to get your groove on.

With The Barry Gray Orchestra's wonderfully kitsch 'Captain Scarlet' theme, the post-punk funk of Glaxo Babies' 'Shake (The Foundations)' and the Pete Burns-fronted Nightmares In Wax adding a touch of eclecticism to the mix, these are bold, era-defining sounds made for dancing. Kitchen disco a-go-go, frilly shirt optional. **VI**

HONEY DIJON
Black Girl Magic
CLASSIC MUSIC COMPANY

Fashion show DJ. Beyoncé producer. Clothing designer. Chicago's Honey Dijon launches her second solo album with an impressive CV behind her. This follow-up to 2017's 'The Best Of Both Worlds' begins with a creed for love. "Watch me work this love," declares Kameelah Waheed, one of a constellation of nearly 20 guests populating this album. Eve sounds celebratory on 'In The Club', while Ramona Renea gives softness to the retro snap of 'Love Is A State Of Mind'.

The house rhythms rock with classy sass. A glitter-cheeked Kiss FM party rooted in disco and garage culture. The beat slaps on the Hadiya George-fronted 'Not About You', the BPMs fronting up with confidence as hangers-on holler along. Compton rapper Channel Tres is as smooth as heck on the irresistible 'Show Me Some Love', championing Jimmy Choo shoes over drugs as the rhythm trills with flamboyant attitude. This love creed for Black voices is another magnificent entry on Dijon's list of accomplishments. **FR**

TWINKLE3 FEAT. DAVID SYLVIAN & KAZUKO HOHKI
Upon This Fleeting Dream
CORTIZONA

If their previous trilogy of releases – 2009's 'Let's Make A Solar System', 2015's 'Debris In Lower Earth Orbit' and 2020's 'Minor Planets' – was cosmic in theme, then 'Upon This Fleeting Dream' looks inwards instead of upwards.

The introspective rumble is set in motion by the trio of Clive Bell, Richard Scott and Dave Ross, but is given emotive weight here by the narrative poetics of David Sylvian and Frank Chickens' Kazuko Hohki, with English and Japanese voices woven throughout.

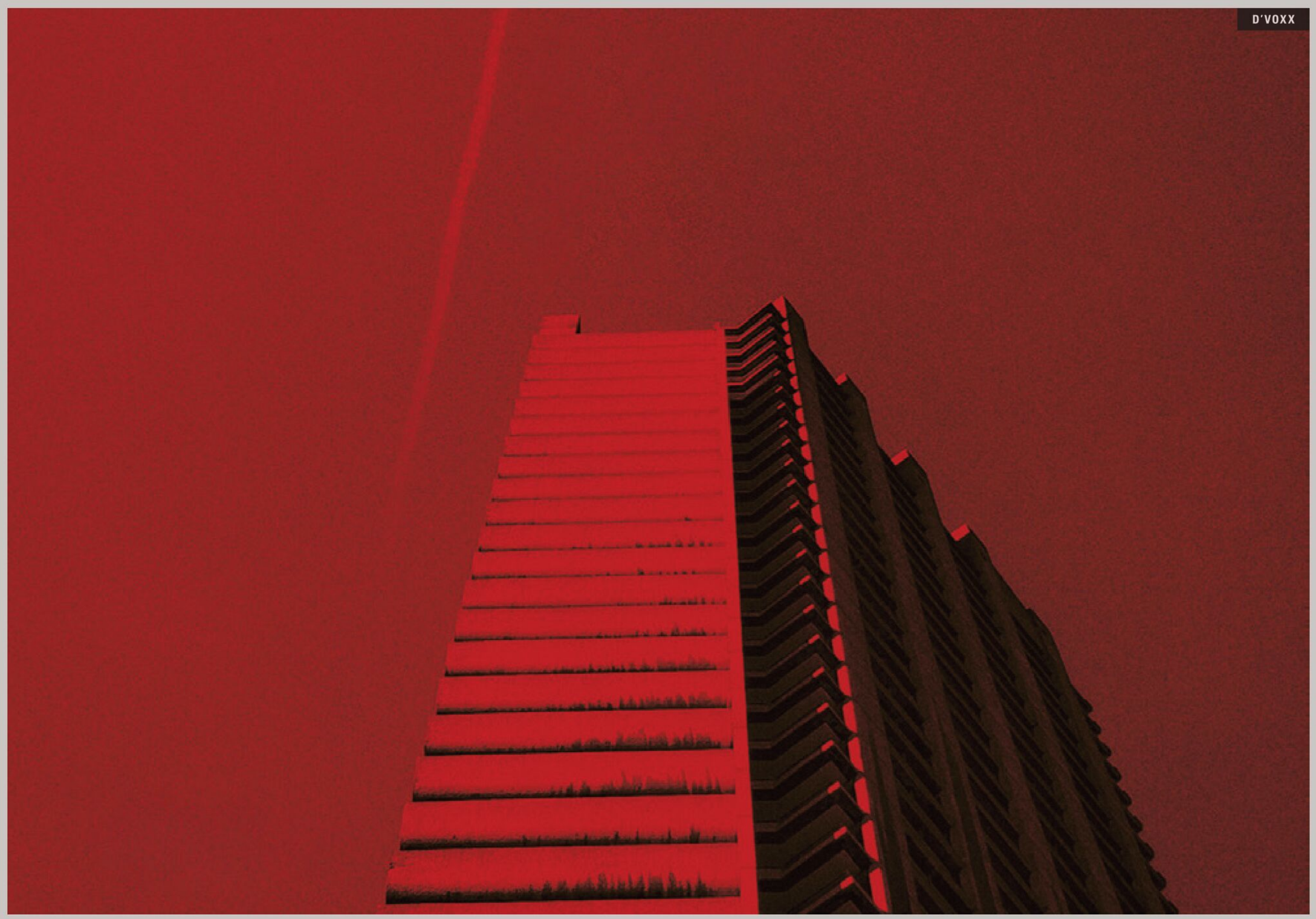
Bell's shakuhachi flute peeps coquettishly across bubbling electronics on the title track, but the vibe is most effective when augmented by Sylvian and Hohki's multilingual interjections. Sylvian also provides evocative field recordings, and when all of these elements collide, as on the angular hubbub of 'If I Leave No Trace', which melts the pitter-patter of raindrops across howling horn and malfunctioning electronics, it's powerful stuff. **ST**

STARGAZE
One
TRANSGRESSIVE

The beatific calm and swathes of deft, poised drama carried by these compelling neoclassical ensemble pieces come courtesy of left-field collective, Stargaze. Among them is Factory Floor and Carter Tutti Void's Nik Colk Void, Battles' compositional supremo Tyondai Braxton, and Deerhoof drummer Greg Saunier. Recorded remotely, this outstanding orchestral suite intentionally blurs the lines between traditional classical and modern music.

Stargaze's mission is to transgress sonic boundaries, helped by cutting-edge digital production techniques and processing, which imbue even the most conservative-sounding flute or piano with a distinctively fresh and contemporary edge.

Among the most startling tracks here is Nik Colk Void's 'Recollection Pulse #3', which marries organic tonal richness with a brooding motorik rhythm, aided by ominous cello strings and a deep, intense drone, building to a thrillingly intense and cinematic climax. **CG**



D'VOXX
1984
DIN

George Orwell's novel '1984' has long been a rich source of inspiration for musicians, from Bowie's abandoned musical that became 'Diamond Dogs', to Eurythmics' film soundtrack featuring 'Sexcrime (Nineteen Eighty-Four)'. So when electronic music veterans (and University of West London music/production lecturers) Paul Borg and Nino Auricchio decided to tackle Orwell's masterpiece on their follow-up to 2019's debut 'Télégraphe', the danger was, perhaps, that it would be a dalliance with the familiar.

Confining themselves to an individual work while operating within the constraints of a modular set-up has paradoxically given D'Voxx freedom to roam free over a diverse sonic landscape. The album – approved by the estate of Sonia Brownell Orwell, George Orwell's second wife – captures the spiralling tensions at the heart of the novel, especially with the creepy looping techno of 'Ministry Of Love', the gnarly cut-up vocals of 'Doublethink' and the chattering of 'Telescreens'. An exquisite showcase of the possibilities of modular synths that simultaneously celebrates and transcends its source material. And that's no doublethink. **AT**

RAMZI
Hyphea
MUSIC FROM MEMORY

Montreal producer Phoebé Guillemot's new album offers up cosy, liquescent soundscapes, created under the alias of RAMZi – a persona Guillemot conceived as a fictional forest spirit, to act as conduit between nature and technology.

RAMZi experiments with sound to explore the ideas of sentient ecosystems and parallel worlds. This symbiotic merging of the organic with the sonic – and the mystical with the digital – are examined from all angles on 'Hyphea'.

While 'Awakenin' opens the record with a warping, glitchy tone, tracks such as 'Fly To Me' and 'Egrégores' evoke psychedelic adventures through mystical arboreal landscapes, and it's all drenched in bright shimmering synths, fragmented and hypnotic vocal samples, and broken beats. The likes of 'Smooshi' and 'Afloat' wouldn't feel out of place on a Boards Of Canada album, but it's the warmth imbued throughout 'Hyphea' that makes it stand out as a glittering ambient gem in its own right. **CC**

GAVIN BRYARS
The Sinking Of The Titanic
SUPERIOR VIADUCT

In an account given to The New York Times after the sinking of the Titanic, its wireless operator, Harold Bride, described how the ship's band continued to play even as the doomed vessel pitched nose-first beneath the waves. On 'The Sinking Of The Titanic', produced by Brian Eno and marking the inaugural release for Eno's Obscure Records in 1975, the English composer Gavin Bryars builds a sonic imagining of how those musicians might have sounded.

On the title track, as violins sway back and forth like a bittersweet 'Amazing Grace', a queasy drone sits low in the mix like metal groaning under stress. You'd expect a feeling of maudlin despair, but somehow Bryars pulls stoicism and hope from within deep tragedy.

He also finds unexpected light with 'Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me Yet'. The looped voice of an unknown homeless man sings a gospel hymn, punctuated by lush string arrangements which appear to strengthen his resolve like an arm around his shoulder. Bryars' work always bristles with humanity, but this reissue underscores 'The Sinking Of The Titanic' as his most devastatingly affecting statement. **ST**

ANDREW WASYLYK

Hearing The Water Before Seeing The Falls

CLAY PIPE

Revelatory, gentle electronic soundscapes

The evolution of Andrew Wasylyk has been quite a journey to behold. As Andrew Mitchell, he formed millennial Scottish indie-poppers The Hazey Janes, progressing from jangly Teenage Fanclub stylings to bold collaborations with poet Liz Lochhead and legendary Dundee folkie Michael Marra. And, since reverting to his original Ukrainian family name, Wasylyk's jazz-tinged solo explorations have felt like the work of a man unleashed, exploring the heart-sinking truths of a world that feels – ironically – increasingly retrograde.

It's Wasylyk's second album for Clay Pipe, a spiritual successor to 2021's 'Balgay Hill: Morning In Magnolia'. But while his previous opus was a wistful pandemic ramble around Dundee's crepuscular park life, the follow-up requires sturdy walking boots and waterproofs. It's an expansive voyage to "horizon-less oceans and limitless landscapes", inspired by the evocative work of US-born photographer Thomas Joshua Cooper. And Wasylyk is barely stopping for sandwiches.

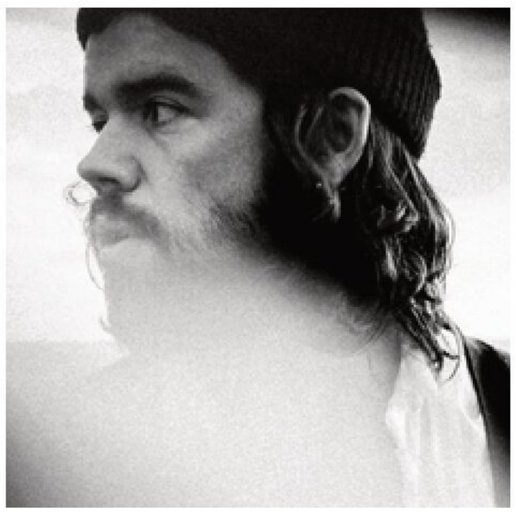
The opener, 'Dreamt In The Current Of Leafless Winter', is a 16-minute trance of mesmeric piano and devotional bells, lent organic colour by the breathy saxophone of Angus Fairbairn, aka Alabaster DePlume. Indeed, the musicianship throughout is effortlessly breathtaking.

Organic is the watchword here. Clay Pipe has a reputation for gentle electronica, but Wasylyk is more 'Astral Weeks' than 'Autobahn'. The title track boasts sweeping harps and a dark, foreboding sky of a brass section. 'Years Beneath A Yarrow Moon' sounds like Michael Nyman eating Kendal Mint Cake on some crumbling, coastal cliff edge. Cooper's photography is affectingly monochrome, but Wasylyk's album feels stridently technicolour, with 'The Confluence' even succumbing to playful and mellow grooves.

Even Cooper himself lends gravelly narration to 'The Life Of Time': "A time of love, a time of anger, a time of fear / Something I know more about day by day than I ever thought possible". In a lifetime of acclaimed photography, Cooper – based in Glasgow since the 1980s – has travelled the extremities of five continents. Now 75, some of his most striking locations are doomed to be imminently submerged by the rising tides of climate change. Wasylyk's beautiful, affecting album feels like both a heartfelt homage to these glorious, weather-beaten outposts, and a melancholy lament for their passing.

BOB FISCHER

Brief Encounters



Scottish producer **Andrew Wasylyk** takes on this month's round of quick-fire questions

Hello, Andrew. Where are you right now and what can you see?

"I'm at home in Dundee. There's a sycamore across the street that's struggling with the gale outside."

A second album on Clay Pipe, then? Frances Castle must be looking after you nicely.

"I feel very fortunate collaborating with Clay Pipe. Frances has been nothing but supportive and encouraging."

The new album started out as a "commissioned response" to 'The World's Edge' exhibition by US landscape photographer Thomas Joshua Cooper...

"The National Galleries Of Scotland invited me to create music to accompany that exhibition. The idea being a soundtrack might work as a response, or evocation, of Thomas' Atlantic Basin images. Unbeknown at the time, that process was also me gathering the tools I'd need for what would grow into 'Hearing The Water Before Seeing The Falls'."

The leap from 'Balgay Hill' to 'Hearing The Water...' is like the difference between 'The Bends' and 'OK Computer'. What changed for you between albums?

"Having the resources to incorporate a six-piece string section for the first time was an important part of the record. The brilliant Pete Harvey has arranged strings for me before, so collaborating with him again was crucial. I'm not sure if the insular circumstances of the pandemic, in which 'Balgay Hill' was conceived, meant that 'Hearing The Water…' was always going to reach for a more expansive sound, but I agree it presents itself differently."

The opening track has all the emotion of Talk Talk in their prime...

"Ha, that's very generous. I don't know if anyone's a match for Talk Talk at the peak of their powers, but I think Alabaster DePlume's tenor saxophone performance on that track is really something."

There's a moment in the title track when the brass kicks in that makes me want to cheer. How was it for you?

"A release, mostly. I was exploring something that rolled with a Joanna Brouk feel, on the serene side of bombastic. A fanfare for the underdog, maybe."

How much of all this features live musicians?

"The trumpet on 'Hearing The Water…' is Rachel Simpson. A brilliant musician and pal. Other live instrumentation includes cor anglais, double bass, violins, violas, cellos and clàrsach. Then there's me, ham-fistedly playing the rest."

You play in Idlewild too. Not to start a fight, but synths or guitar?

"Well, guitar was my first love. It's a fine instrument. But this week I'll go with the joy of a Juno-60 arpeggiator."

Buried Treasure

DALEK I LOVE YOU

Dalek I Love You

KOROVA, 1983

I was introduced to the music of Orchestral Manoeuvres In The Dark when I was 15. By the time I was 17, I was besotted with the band and had become the local OMD expert (there wasn't a lot of competition for the role in rural Shropshire, mind). I was able to reel off chart positions, track listings, release dates and anything else you could possibly want to know about the Wirral synthsters, including a consummate list of other musical projects that members of the band had been involved with over the years.

One such project was a band called Dalek I Love You, also from the Wirral, who put out three albums and a handful of singles between 1979 and 1986. The group's notoriously fluid line-up briefly included three musicians (among them, Andy McCluskey) who would go on to be in OMD. The one constant creative force throughout their short-lived career was Alan Gill, who is perhaps best known as the co-writer of The Teardrop Explodes' defining 1981 single, 'Reward'.

Not that Dalek I Love You remotely resembled The Teardrop Explodes, or indeed OMD. They had an eccentric, gently experimental sound all of their own, which was arguably at its most idiosyncratic on the band's eponymous second album, released in 1983.

Opening with the eerie, offbeat funk of 'Holiday In Disneyland', 'Dalek I Love You' leads its listeners on a paranoia-laced jaunt marked by zippy synthesisers and macabre lyrics, as well as surprisingly honeyed melodies that keep tracks like 'Horrorscope' ("Tonight's ideal for planning a crime / If you lived through June") and 'Ambition' ("Look good / Get smart / Smell nice / Work hard") from falling headfirst into a sea of busy rhythm sections and demented sentiment.

Despite its undeniable madness, the album is still a fresh and enjoyable listen almost 40 years after it was recorded. Alas, few people seem to have recognised its worth, and 'Dalek I Love You' remains unfairly confined to the realms of obscurity, the allure of its zany yet driven sound often left unsung, even in early 80s new wave circles.

I spoke to Alan Gill on the telephone just before writing this piece, and I asked what he'd been up to recently. He told me that his most recent commercial music project was a psychedelic/jazz-influenced band called The Most High. He also mentioned that, prior to our conversation, he'd listened to 'Dalek I Love You' for the first time in 25 years and had come to the conclusion that it still sounded OK. Your 'Understatement Of The Year' award is in the post, Mr Gill.

IMOGEN BEBB

VECTOR LOVERS

Capsule For One (Special Edition)

LAPSUS

Reissue of essential IDM masterpiece

As Vector Lovers, York's Martin Wheeler has been making warm, robotic electro and IDM for almost 20 years. Dip into any of his work – the sinewy introspection of 2003's debut seven-inch 'Tokyo Glitterati', 2013's luxuriant 'iPhonica' album, the brooding ambience of 2020's 'Separation' soundtrack – and you'll likely succumb to Wheeler's immersive, cybernated thrum in an instant.

But it's the second album, 'Capsule For One', that's widely considered to be his magnum opus. First released in 2005 on Glasgow's Soma label, it majestically re-synthesised that whole ethos of 90s IDM – a "worthy successor to the venerated Warp artists", as the accompanying blurb rightly puts it.

Reissued on Barcelona's Lapsus Records, this new edition is a delight. Self-confessed synth geek Wheeler has remixed every track here, updating the original album's post-rave "hardcore continuum". With essential lustre duly applied – man, that bass oomph – his impeccable production glistens like a freshly applied sonic coat of paint.

Tinged with seductive melancholy, Vector Lovers' music wields an innate power, taking you on journeys to amorphous, anime-like worlds on the borders of space and time. Pulsating and highly charged one minute, introspective and emotive the next – like The Black Dog and Boards Of Canada tussling for control of the tiller – 'Capsule For One' is built on masterful arrangement and layering, switching the mood at will.

Electronic ballad 'Melodies And Memory' has real soul, fusing Wheeler's vocoded voice with Kraftwerkian tech-house. 'Neon Sky Rain' feels like cruising around a 'Blade Runner'-esque cityscape at 3am – proper goosebumps territory. 'Substrata' is all sumptuous beats and bleeps. And 'Microtron' offers more full-on techno vibes, while the glacial 'Boulevard' snares you in its repetitive groove. Total escapist bliss.

There are a couple of cracking unreleased tracks, too. 'A Simulation' feels like losing yourself in a peak-hour club banger, and 'Perfect Score' is just that – an atmospheric sci-fi soundtrack-in-waiting. As an electronic producer, Martin Wheeler has never fully got his due. But maybe the reissue of this exemplary gem will finally begin to change all that.

According to his Twitter feed, he's currently "playing around with ideas for a mini-album based on the first 'Alien' movie… a dystopian, darkwave ambient soundscape". Take our money.

VELIMIR ILIC

SAINT JUDE - PHOTO: ANTONIA ADOMAKO

SAINT JUDE

Signal

SLOW DANCE RECORDINGS

Saint Jude is famously the patron saint of hopeless causes, and south London songwriter and producer Jude Woodhead takes on some of his titular namesake's patronly superpowers, as he attempts to shoehorn every conceivable modern genre into his debut long-player, 'Signal'. A fool's errand, you might think, and yet the imaginative leaps from genre to genre are one of this album's great strengths.

Intriguingly, there's not one title track but actually three, featuring collaborators who contribute either spoken word (Trimm, Louis Culture) or gospel vocals (Halina) laid over atmospheric, ominous thrumming. It's an album that imbues a sense of alienation and occasionally unease, at times otherworldly but always in touch with the urban chaos that surrounds it.

Woodhead begins with the glowering electronica of 'Does' and finishes with 'To Repel Ghosts' – a song that could be the missing link between Billy Bragg and King Krule – and there are surprises in store everywhere in between. One to watch. **JA**

JEAN-MICHEL JARRE

Oxymore

SONY

Consistently ahead of the curve, ardent futurist Jean-Michel Jarre has always been a master of audio technology and sound manipulation, but his latest album messes with your head like never before. As much as the cover image – a sort of hyperreal, 'Star Wars'-like Galactic Senate – sends your eyes a bit mad, JMJ's music on 'Oxymore' feels more ambitious and immersive than ever. An homage to French musique concrète pioneer Pierre Henry, it's a thrilling journey into multi-channel, 3D binaural sound.

Best experienced via headphones, 'Oxymore' is chock-full of layers, textures and disorientating sonic details, a masterclass of resonant, 360-degree spatial audio that plays around with VR-influenced soundscapes. The opener, 'Agora', creates the effect of water trickling down inside your head and 'Animal Genesis' places you in a dense, eerie rainforest, while 'Zeitgeist' feels like Kraftwerk larging it on techno.

Even after more than 50 years, JMJ is still innovating and experimenting, and 'Oxymore' – bold, brash, exhilarating – is the sound of a man and his machines in total electronic harmony. Plug in, and indulge. **VI**

THE BALLOONIST

The Balloonist

WAYSIDE AND WOODLAND RECORDINGS

"A hazy glide above the British countryside, an arcadia that has only ever existed within the mind." Ben Holton claims lofty inspiration for this stunning collection, while admitting the initial spark came from an episode of 1970s BBC lunchtime staple, 'Mr Benn'. The autumnal melancholy of early childhood pervades. 'First Light' is the gentlest of lift-offs, with chiming guitars rising through a soft buzz of tape hiss to reach a patchwork horizon of rolling synths. 'Above It All' adds school xylophones and the distant hubbub of traffic.

By the time we spot 'A Stranger Waving From A Field', we're drifting gently through a golden haze of beguiling, enchanting bleeps. It feels like a leisurely flight from modernity, with the convoluted, bile-fuelled bollocks of 2022 left firmly on the ground. *Everyone* is nice here. The shuddering guitars and Vangelis sweeps of 'Tracing Ancient Lines' add a welcome whiff of mysticism, and as we reach the concluding finger-picks of 'Landing', there's distinct wistfulness at the prospect of touchdown. It has been a wonderful journey. **BF**

MAJA LENA - PHOTO: MARTHA WEBB

MAJA LENA

Pluto

CHIVERIN

During her 13 years working in a natural horsemanship yard, Swedish folkie Marianne Parrish found her thoughts drifting to fantastical realms. So her second solo album as Maja Lena combines this love of the pastoral with a new-found passion for 'Battlestar Galactica'. It's a beguiling amalgamation, apparently set on "an alternate world, close to Pluto". But it's an alternate world with decidedly relatable feelings. "Today I have asked far too many questions / When am I going to learn to just say goodnight?" she sings on the opener 'Daylight Comes Revealing', bringing vulnerability to the otherworldly.

There are obvious Kate Bush comparisons to be made, as Parrish's mellifluous vocals combine with exotic instrumentation and tribal beats. Certainly, the likes of 'No More Flowers' could come straight from 'The Sensual World', and eccentric confidence exudes throughout. "I will stand on the boulder, stand on its shoulder / No more crouching behind it," she sings on minimalist synthpop gem, 'Clear As The Water'. Stepping out from the shadows, she's made an album of crystalline beauty. **BF**

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Generation Blitz 3 – Extended

STATE OF BASS

State Of Bass are back with the third instalment of their expansive 'Generation Blitz' compilations, following on from last year's 'Generation Blitz – Dusk to Dawn' and 'Generation Blitz 2 – Concrete and Chrome' from earlier this year. It's another absolute cornucopia of post-punk, synthpop, and other assorted electronic delights, with the bulk of the tracks appearing in the form of extended mixes or edits.

While there are some names that are more recognisable than others – London duo Cult With No Name, for example, and their feel-good, A Certain Ratio-esque opener 'Low On High (Hire And Hire Mix)' – the real joy here is digging in and likely discovering your new favourite artist. With 24 tracks to explore, choosing a favourite proves tricky, though Inochi's groovy 'The Cat', Means Of Production's bouncy, 808-sounding 'Resuscitation Status', Blood Everywhere's synth-heavy 'Ice Cream Man' and Magnetic Skies' melodic synthpop ballad 'Into Paradise (Magnetic Mix)' are all excellent places to start. **CF**

PATRICK COWLEY

Malebox

DARK ENTRIES

Patrick Cowley occupies a pivotal role in disco's gradual evolution into full blown hi-NRG. Sadly cut down by an AIDS-related illness before he was able to appreciate the full extent of his own influence, Dark Entries have spent much of the last decade excavating his more obscure work. To mark the 40th anniversary of his passing on 12 November 1982, they've unearthed another six previously unreleased tracks.

Most of the material here takes the form of demos Cowley made for other artists between 1979 and 1981. So 'Love & Passion' and 'Floating' have a minimalist quality by definition. Your ears yearn to add synth lines and vocals to these sketches – there's an air of "what could have been".

Still, his infectious melodies and insidious funk remain, best exemplified on the aptly titled 'Low Down Dirty Rhythm', featuring a fabulously cool vocal from Jeanie Tracy, and 'If You Feel It', which would have just required the presence of Sylvester to make it another 'Do Ya Wanna Funk'. Brilliant and bittersweet. **WS**

SOISONG
qXn948s
DAIS

Radical sonic experiments, revisited

This 2008 collaboration between Coil's Peter Christopherson and Russian experimentalist Ivan Pavlov was characterised by eccentric format and merchandising choices. Complex origami CD cases, websites obfuscated by passwords, a Walkman with limited battery life. These days, we just have Spotify's bewildering search incapabilities to trip us up.

Now Dais Records brings 'qXn948s' to vinyl for the first time, and as the introduction implies, it's an enjoyably awkward listen. The four long-form tracks here feel like a bunch of samples wheelbarrowed into effects unit after effects unit until there's hardly anything left. The album begins with 'Kabuki-Chop', lilting brass clanks offering a ritualistic start that summons statically charged ambience and eerie murmurs. Late in the track, circling sonic ghosts corral into a demonic glitch beat.

In 'Soijin No Hi', asthma-interrupted panpipes nudge pinballing electronic squeals, with all the exhausted energy of R2-D2 mid-Covid. There's so much going on – everything including the kitchen sink, which itself is full of kitchen sinks. Yet the pair allow the track to space out into gasps of piano-flecked quietness, and conversely into shattered spikes of buzzing rhythm. The padded frequencies of 'Koi Ru' are so stop-start cautious, you'll be checking your speakers. Growing vibraphone splashes warm the heart, even though those opening tones filter into something nastier and snappier. The track eventually gets caught in a hiccupping loop, giving us a hook while melodies splatter and swirl in excited crescendos.

This duo had a knack for ephemeral rhythms. The muscular techno bass on 'Jam Talay Sai' slides down a scree of ethereal shards and metallic reverb. Yet despite the constant aural bewilderment, these weird and wandering sounds recall welcome touchpoints of electronic music. There are hints of Belgian techno, quiverings of electropop, flurries of folktronica. A soupcon of Susumu Yokota, a memory cache of Caterina Barbieri, and a distant throb of, naturally, Throbbing Gristle. Which makes this record (released a couple of years before Christopherson's death) both a curious time capsule and, more importantly, a more listenable experience than you might expect for a CD case that you couldn't get open.

FAT ROLAND

Label Profile

STATE OF BASS

Label: State Of Bass
Location: Southampton / Crediton
Est: 2020

Potted History: "I've always had an 'I can do that' attitude, which comes from an irrational fusion of stupidity, bravado and excessive enthusiasm," explains label founder, musician, writer and Electronic Sound contributor, Martin James. "I initially started State Of Bass in 2018 as a book publisher, taking the name from my book 'State Of Bass – Jungle: The Story So Far'.

"In 2020 it became a record label with the simple aim of releasing music by myself and Sean Albiez, whose ambient work as Ghost Electron was our first album in 2021. As a duo working under the name Nostalgia Deathstar, we put out a track a month throughout 2020, culminating in our album 'Charged Attachment' in 2021. Nostalgia Deathstar's music was picked up by a seemingly invisible global synthpop scene and we were subsequently introduced to loads of new artists doing some really interesting work. We decided to release the 'Generation Blitz' compilations that drew on this scene. The label has grown from there."

Mission Statement: "Despite the 80s aesthetic of some of the music we release, State Of Bass is anti-nostalgia. We bring together artists inspired by electronic pop's golden era of 1979-1984, but take those inspirations into new places. Together, these artists form a scene that is an open space for all genders, sexualities, ethnicities, ages and abilities. We're proud to have promoted music that fully represents this diversity."

Key Artists & Releases: "Along with Nostalgia Deathstar and Ghost Elektron, we've also issued albums by New York's Wavewulf and Melbourne's Sonar 4, who both first put out music on 'Generation Blitz'. The compilation series has included exclusive contributions from better-known artists like Sink Ya Teeth, Gemma Cullingford, Tim Lefebvre, Cult With No Name and B-Movie, and a range of lesser-known but equally amazing artists like Means Of Production, Lines Of Flight, Denial Waits and Xibling."

Future Plans: "We have albums scheduled for 2023 by Finland's Pulse Lab (ABBA meets Propaganda), Anglo-Australian band Mothloop (No Zu meets Working Men's Club) and synthpunk duo Suck Disco. We're also planning the next 'Generation Blitz' which will be called 'Contaminated Disco/Mutant Electro'. Other plans include a seven-inch singles club and an ambient sub-label, Stateless Base. Basically, we'll become the embodiment of David Bowie's 'Low' with one side left-field pop and the other ambient."

Any Other Business? "Sean and I are also both academics," says James. "Sean has edited collections about Kraftwerk, Eno and The Velvet Underground. I've written about French electronic music, drum 'n' bass and post-punk. Inevitably the label output is producing data for our research which will be published in the future, starting with a paper about late-stage musicians, invented nostalgia and imagined histories."

For more, visit stateofbass.bandcamp.com

First And Last And Always

Nyx Nótt – aka Arab Strap's **Aidan Moffat** – on the first and last albums he bought, and one he always returns to

FIRST

BEASTIE BOYS

Licensed To Ill

DEF JAM/COLUMBIA, 1986

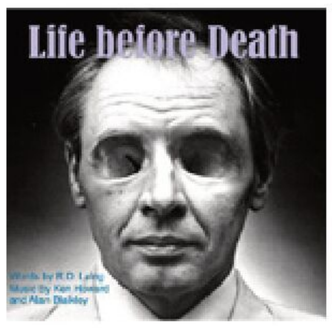
"The first album I bought might've been Beastie Boys' 'Licensed To Ill' when I was 13. I had loads of albums before then. I was always given them for birthdays, Christmas and occasional treats, and I got my first Walkman when I was eight. This was the first cassette I bought myself, though, because my mum absolutely hated the band and refused to buy it. Their best album, as far as I'm concerned."

LAST

RD LAING

Life Before Death

CHARISMA, 1978



"I rarely buy LPs now because I've nowhere to put them. I recently gave half of my records to a local Oxfam and finally joined the streaming world (Apple, though – never Spotify!). If I buy records now, they're usually rare old things. The most recent was RD Laing's 'Life Before Death' – a brilliant, hilarious, spoken word album by Scotland's legendary psychiatrist – a near-mint copy that I managed to damage within minutes."

ALWAYS

SLINT

Spiderland

TOUCH AND GO, 1991

"One of my most cherished records is the white label promo of Slint's 'Spiderland' that I bought from Edinburgh's Avalanche shop on Cockburn Street when I was 17. I phoned them from school in Falkirk and when they offered to sell it to me, I walked straight out the door and got the train to Edinburgh. An album I'll always love, although I don't dare play the white label anymore."

NYX NÓTT

Themes From

MELODIC

Neon-lit, late-night channel surfing

Every bedroom producer would like to think they have a film soundtrack in them. Less so a TV theme, which for some reason is still seen as the poor relation among the televisual arts. So credit to Arab Strap's Aidan Moffatt, who with this solo release under his Nyx Nótt alias celebrates the music of the small screen, once the domain of such library doyens as Alan Hawkshaw and Keith Mansfield.

It's certainly way removed from Arab Strap, and a neat onwards step from the previous Nyx Nótt album, 2020's 'Aux Pieds De La Nuit'. That record used brushed drums, eerie strings and muffled brass to mimic a somnolent shuffle through deserted nocturnal backstreets. He's used similar instrumentation here to create eight compositions, all with genre-derived titles.

The samples all come from modern library sources but are fleshed out to create something that sounds both classic, but also not a million miles from the aural fare you might encounter if you switched on the box on an average weekday evening. And so 'Porno' bustles in with sleazy sax while a mute trumpet oozes in the background. 'Thriller' features creepy piano and a jazz drum loop, before the strings sweep in and carry the track through to its logical destination. 'Hardboiled' matches acid squelch with mournful trumpets. And 'Swashbuckler' is an unlikely amalgam of Boards Of Canada-style synth lines, woodwind and military drumming.

There are very few lapses into cliche. When Moffatt does doff his cap to TV tradition he very deliberately shakes up the snowglobe – 'Tearjerker' features minor key piano chords groaningly familiar to anyone who has chanced across those family reunion programmes, but he chooses to juxtapose these with a growling and distorted synth loop that thankfully slices through the mawkishness.

It's all beautifully executed, and Moffatt treads a careful line – in less capable hands this could have been a more overt homage to the library music of the 60s and 70s and risked tumbling into cheesy pastiche. Instead, you could easily imagine a contemporary TV producer syncing several of these tracks. In which case – job done. Run titles.

WILL SIMPSON

BIOSPHERE
Substrata (Alternative Versions)
BIOPHON

Twenty-five years after its inception, this new version of the acclaimed 1997 album from Norwegian ambient techno heavyweight Biosphere (Geir Jenssen) feels like it floats in on a wave of hyperreality.

At the time of its initial release, 'Substrata' was deemed to be at the darker, moodier end of ambient chill-out, evoking dramatic science fiction versions of icy Nordic vistas with its vivid drone soundscapes. Recontextualised for 2022, however, the record feels like a reflection of the strange reality in which we now live.

The lengthy, amorphous composition of 'Sphere Of No-Form' seems to speak to the bleakness of living through a time of such eerie ecological uncertainty, while metallic and sometimes menacing tracks like 'Hyperborea' and 'Kobresia' conjure glittering lights and sliding glaciers with a pathos that is somehow more palpable here than in the original record. Perhaps most poignant of all is 'Antennaria', which feels like an elegy for melting, dripping ice caps – sad and beautiful. **CC**

THE HOME CURRENT
The Circus Hunter
SUBEXOTIC

Conceived by Luxembourg-dwelling producer Martin Jensen as an imagined soundtrack to "an 80s horror circus flick", 'The Circus Hunter' works its way along a high wire between whimsy and a shadowy sense of foreboding. In Jensen's sound world, the travelling circus is a place of delight but also something darker, lending his techno-inflected, cinematically oriented tracks a sense of peril but also triumph.

The album has a transportive quality – the urgent, sinister and tense framework of 'The Psycho Clowns Of Syracuse' reminded me of a solitary trip to a travelling circus in my youth, where I spent the whole time anxiously wondering if the tent was going to collapse. Meanwhile, something about the sparkling melody and noisy beats of the brilliant 'Ludwig's Lament' took me back to the mid-90s and the formative 'Trance Europe Express' series. Roll up, roll up for Jensen's brooding, edgy, high-energy vision of the greatest show on earth. **MS**

VARIOUS ARTISTS
A Tribute To Ryuichi Sakamoto: To The Moon And Back
MILAN

Ryuichi Sakamoto has always been a restless pioneer. Since the formation of Yellow Magic Orchestra in Tokyo in 1978, he's forged a unique path that has journeyed from synthpop and electro via the yearning delicate melodies of 'Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence' (here given a deceptively soaring makeover by Electric Youth) to atmospheric cinema soundtracks with a keen mastery of the traditional orchestra.

This compilation celebrates Sakamoto's 70th birthday, and features contemporary artists (Dev Hynes, Hildur Guðnadóttir) and collaborators (Alva Noto, Fennesz) resulting in sympathetic reworks that both respect and subvert the originals.

Two highlights perhaps best illustrate the eclecticism that characterises this collection, mirroring Sakamoto's career. Where else could you get the pensive minimalism of David Sylvian on 'Grains (Sweet Paulownia Wood)' alongside the expansive electro soul of Thundercat's deliriously unrecognisable reworking of 'Thousand Knives'? Enthralling stuff. **AT**

JON IVERSON

Many Worlds Interpretation

SÉANCE CENTRE

Jon Iverson's biography is like a PR's wet dream, with the Californian starting out in the 1970s making music with college roommate "Weird Al" Yankovic, before splitting with him to focus on "serious music" inspired by the likes of Vangelis and Jean-Michel Jarre .

Yet it's a testament to the force of the music that this terrific story becomes a mere footnote once you press play on 'Many Worlds Interpretation'. This short and sweet seven-track album contains unreleased pieces recorded by Iverson in the 1980s, deftly mixing jangly Americana in a Berlin School synth mould to glorious, psychotropic effect.

Marvellously original, the acoustic guitar swipes and burbling synth lines of 'Fox Tales' sound like John Martyn and Steve Reich collaborating on a minimalist sci-fi synthscape, while the mystical warbles of 'River Fen' could be Tangerine Dream via Nashville. Iverson, who created all this in his self-built home studio, says he "knew this music wasn't commercial, but didn't care". No matter – he'll find a willing audience on these pages. **ILS**

THIS IMMORTAL COIL

The World Ended A Long Time Ago

ICI D'AILLEURS

Thirteen years on from 'The Dark Age of Love' – This Immortal Coil's first and, at the time, supposedly only album – a second collection of Coil covers has emerged out of various sessions by Ici D'Ailleurs label boss Stéphane Gregoire and assorted friends.

We get 10 new versions, which – it may be no surprise to hear – echo the gloom of the originals. But they're not slavishly reverential by any means. The version of 'A White Rainbow', for instance, is less grim but more emotional, Shannon Wright's vocals highlighted by the electronic strings and occasional synth-generated bleeps and blurps. Former industrial jungle experimentalist Third Eye Foundation (aka Matt Eliott) sings or rather speaks 'Where Are You' and makes it sound frighteningly, compulsively intimate, as accompanying clarinets and cellos become increasingly tense.

All in all, this is a fitting tribute to a legendary group. It's perhaps slightly more human and less bleak than Coil themselves, but it still orbits around the darkest shadows of life. **BW**

VILLAGE OF THE SUN

First Light

GEARBOX

Village Of The Sun is an unlikely new trio bringing together London jazz virtuosos Moses Boyd and Binker Golding with Simon Ratcliffe from Basement Jaxx.

Though it's often tempting to peer at an artist through the lens of their back catalogue, 'First Light' finds each member in a groove that sits a few inches apart from their previous work – and that is particularly true for Ratcliffe.

The album pushes a high-octane energy, as Boyd sculpts propulsive rhythms and Golding erupts into ferocious spiritual voice on tenor sax, while Ratcliffe's glimmering keys and subtle production add colour to the fireworks, enveloping the whole album in a sumptuously atmospheric electronic membrane.

The terrific 'Cesca' might at first resemble the quiet power of Floating Points and Pharaoh Sanders' 'Promises', but it soon ignites into a ball of flame, leaving you hot, bothered and quickly demanding more. As London's jazz scene continues to expand and blossom, 'First Light' is a glimpse at all the wonderful possibilities that can occur when musical worlds collide. **ILS**

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Heavenly Remixes 5 & 6

HEAVENLY RECORDINGS

London label's latest remix treasure-trove

It's office party season! While we can't say if Heavenly Recordings' own bash will involve soggy mince pies and Secret Santa, we're certain – on the evidence of these very fine compilations – that the soundtrack will be a cut above Slade and Shakin' Stevens.

'Remixes 5 & 6' follows the two collections of the late Andrew Weatherall's remixes of Heavenly artists released earlier this year, with selections of what you'd hear on the office stereo at Heavenly HQ after hours. As a remit, it's as wide as the eclectic roster that has been the label's hallmark since 1990. As with 2021's 'Remixes 1 & 2' the only real criteria for a track's inclusion seems to be whether it's a bona fide dancefloor bomb.

It's also apparent that, while they haven't exactly saved the best until last, Heavenly haven't been scraping the barrel to fill another two volumes either. So you get reworkings of some of the label's earliest releases – such as The Chemical Brothers' psychedelic trip down Saint Etienne's 'Like A Motorway' – right up to newbies like Confidence Man, whose 'Holiday' is propelled upwards by some infectiously happy house riffs courtesy of Bruise. There are famous faces, like David Holmes getting remixed by Daniel Avery, sharing space with the forgotten Espiritu – the none-more-90s trip hop act given some serious low-end wobble on remixes from Jon Carter's Monkey Mafia and junglist jump-up dons Urban Takeover.

Elsewhere, New York producer Anthony Naples gives Working Men's Club's punky 'Teeth' a smoother sheen, and Psychemagik stretch Mildlife's jazz-funk out into echoing dub. But if one track sums 'Remixes 5 & 6' up, it's Weatherall's 'Audrey Is A Little Bit Partial' version of his infamous remix of one of Heavenly's defining tunes – Flowered Up's 'Weekender'. Not because of the original's lyrics about escaping the drudgery of the office – indeed, Weatherall jettisons Liam Maher's vocals entirely – but because every element of it is precision-tooled to make you bounce, whether at a club with your mates, or around the photocopier with Sharon from accounts.

PAUL CLARKE

CLUSTER

Cluster II

BUREAU B

German classic on 50th anniversary vinyl

Half a century ago, electronic music was quietly foretelling what the future might look like, although certainly not *all* electronic music. Much of the attendant Moog-led demonstrations had to be conventional and gimmicky enough to grab people's attention. At the opposite end of the scale, you had the fierce, dialectical approach of sonic academics that hasn't necessarily aged that well. But in both West Germany and in Berlin there were artists making sounds that were way ahead of their time, so it's little wonder that they mostly slipped under the radar back then.

Cluster were one of those bands of visionaries, featuring the duo of Hans-Joachim Roedelius and Dieter Moebius, two experimental musicians whose names together have the ring of predestiny. When they formed as Kluster in 1969 with maverick electronic musician Conrad Schnitzler, they deliberately allowed themselves to be untrammelled by the prevalence of Anglo-Saxon rock 'n' roll, which was having such a pernicious influence in the shape of the Schlager variant. Once Schnitzler departed, Cluster – now with a 'C' – became more cosmic in scope on their self-titled debut with Conny Plank, and 'Cluster II' went further in its fusion of exploration and electronics.

Re-released by Bureau B to mark its 50th anniversary, 'Cluster II' has become a significant part of the DNA of electronic music, and a precursor to what their future collaborator Brian Eno would call "ambient".

'Plas' emerges from a primordial soup of electronics, getting heavier and more atmospheric as time passes, and 'Im Süden' builds on a simple ostinato in a peculiar time signature, increasingly lurching and feeding back into itself as it unfurls, becoming more hypnotic with each passing minute. Even more sparsely spacey is 'Live In Der Fabrik', which is enlivened by a pulse created from its own loop.

It's often said that the so-called krautrock bands made their own genre of music in reaction to the past, and with no group is that truer than with Cluster. 'Cluster II' is a tabula rasa of inspired improvisation, which benefits from the life experience of Hans-Joachim Roedelius, who was older than his peers and who had seen the horrors of war first-hand as a child. In that sense, there is some authentic grit in its utopianism – another reason why it still sounds so vital five decades later.

JEREMY ALLEN

REVIEWS BY
JEREMY ALLEN,
IMOGEN BEBB,
CLAIRE CARROLL,
PAUL CLARKE,
BOB FISCHER,
CLAIRE FRANCIS,
CARL GRIFFIN,
FREDDIE HUDSON,
VELIMIR ILIC,
MARTIN JAMES,
ISAAK LEWIS-SMITH,
FAT ROLAND,
JOE SILVA,
WILL SIMPSON,
MAT SMITH,
ANTHONY THORNTON,
SPENSER TOMSON,
BEN WILLMOTT

BANGING ON

In desperate need of a sugar fix, our self-styled columnist is heading for Electronic Sound HQ. Not again. Excuse us while we lock up the biscuits and batten down the hatches

WORDS AND PICTURES: FAT ROLAND

This month, I got to visit the Electronic Sound offices. It was a meeting as momentous as Tory Spice visiting Nelson Mandela, or Bugs Bunny meeting a carrot. I've visited other places too, such as the Withernsea Spatula Factory and the Cramlington Snot Museum. But this visit was special. I walked right in off the street, and they didn't strip-search me or anything, which was a big shame.

For those unfamiliar with the inner workings of the greatest electronic music publication since Gary Numan's Favourite Crayons Annual 1980, I don't actually work at Electronic Sound HQ. I'm not allowed my own workstation due to the biscuit crumb disaster of 2014 which we're not allowed to talk about. Instead, they keep me in a crow's nest way above the offices. I say crow's nest… it's a wicker basket on a pole. This sounds awful, like living inside a nappy recycling bin or living inside a burning ring of fire or living in Rhyl. But it's not too bad. There's Wi-Fi for my online poker addiction. There are little pockets to hold my many cheese triangles. And when I need the toilet, I can just relax and release. The wicker floor allows bodily waste to drip gracefully through, and this then acts as a handy lubricant when I'm thigh-sliding down the pole. My crow's nest is great, as long as I avoid getting hit by seagulls, frisbees, jumbo jets and crows.

They've got more than spatulas, by the way. In the Withernsea Spatula Factory. There's an aisle of mechanical whisks, and a whole section devoted to potato peelers. You won't find any sandwich toasters or those new-fangled air fryers. No, this is your basic kitchen equipment. Things you can put on hooks. Apparently, Withernsea also has a popular comb exhibition, but I'd rather see a load of kitchen utensils than gross combs knotted with scalp-flecked hair. I've got two-for-one tickets if you fancy visiting. Just write your name at the bottom of this page and I'll get back to you.

Dammit. I've lost my thread. Spatulas. Frisbees. Crayons? Oh yes, my visit to the offices of Electronic Sound. I must admit, I got a bit disoriented on the way. I have zero sense of direction. There was a Vinyl Exchange I shopped at once that, I swear, used to rotate its floors like one of those weird paternoster lifts. I'd trot down into the basement to browse the electronic music CDs – that was easy enough. After half an hour of finger-flapping my way through their overstock of Basement Jaxx, I'd canter off and walk straight into a broom cupboard. Or into their staffroom. Or, gulp, into the heavy metal section. Bad times.

Now I come to think of it, the Electronic Sound offices weren't quite what I expected. Instead of shelves of magazines, there were rows and rows of cheese and onion pasties. I thought I'd see a door to an editorial office, but there was just a pile of jam doughnuts on special offer. And the sign outside said "Greggs" instead of "Electronic Sound". Still, it was nice to meet my fellow journalists. I say "journalists"… I lined up some vegan sausage rolls and blobbed eyes on them with doughnut icing. I gave them names and everything. Quentin. Tallulah. Another Quentin.

Alright, alright, I never did visit the Electronic Sound offices. The whole thing was a lie. I actually popped to a Greggs bakery to buy a stack of salted caramel yum-yums. They're twisty sugary pillows for your mouth! Look, I can fit 12 in my gob at once. Mfffph, mummmble, mmmmfffff.

NOMARK

OUT NOW FROM AMON TOBIN

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"A STRIKING REMINDER OF HOW ALL-ENCOMPASSING AMON TOBIN'S TALENTS GENUINELY ARE AND HOW LUCKY WE ARE TO HAVE HIM AROUND." - *POP MATTERS*

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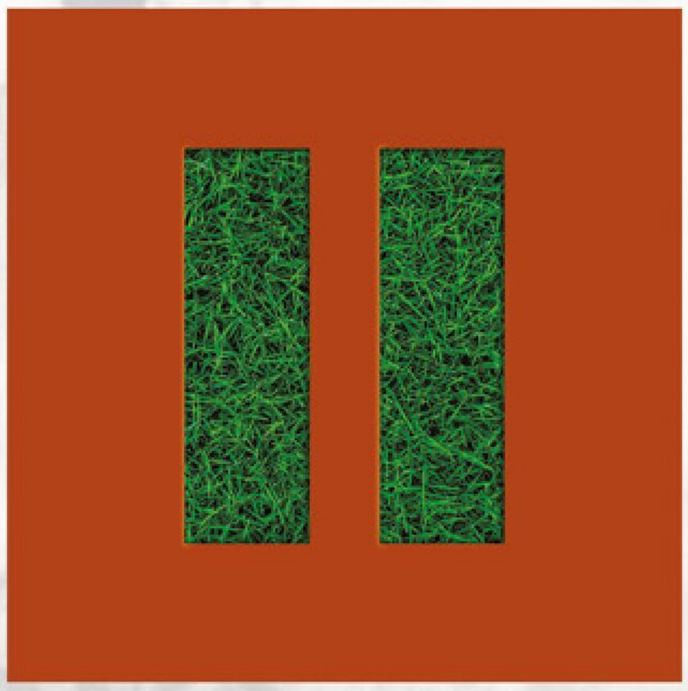

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